Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/goldencalfnovel00brad_2

THE GOLDEN CALF.

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes

VOL. III.

LONDON:

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL,

MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

1883

[*All rights reserved*]

WILLIAM RIDER AND SON, PRINTERS,

BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE, E.C.

CONTENTS TO VOL. III.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Lady Palliser Studies the Upper Ten . .	1
II.	'All Our Life is Mixed with Death' . .	28
III.	'Fruits Fail and Love Dies and Time Ranges'	43
IV.	'My Seed was Youth, my Crop was endless Care'	72
V.	"And, if I Die, no Soul will Pity Me" .	155
VI.	John Jardine solves the Mystery . . .	184
VII.	An Englishman's House is His Castle . .	223
VIII.	"As one Dead in the Bottom of a Tomb" .	238
IX.	A Fiery Dawn	249
X.	"Sole Partner and Sole Part of all these Joys	262

THE GOLDEN CALF.

CHAPTER I.

LADY PALLISER STUDIES THE UPPER TEN.

IDA was not left long in ignorance as to the friendly feelings of those she had left behind at Kingthorpe. Bessie's first letter reached her within a few days of her arrival at Wimperfield—a loving little letter, full of sorrowful expressions about the two good young fellows who were gone, yet not concealing the writer's pleasure at her friend's elevation.

'When are we to meet again, dearest?' asked Bessie, after she had given full expression to her feelings; 'are you to come to us, or are we to go to you? What is the etiquette of the situation? Father and mother know nothing about outside points of etiquette. Beyond the common rules of dinners and calls, calls and dinners, I believe they are in be-

nighted ignorance. Shall we tell John Coachman to put four horses to the landau—with himself and the under-gardener as postilions—and post over to Wimperfield—just as they pay visits in Miss Austin's novels. Perhaps now we have gone back to Chippendale furniture, we shall return to muslin frocks and the manners of Miss Austin's time. I'm sure I wish we could. Life seems to have been so much simpler in her day, and so much cheaper. Darling, I am longing to see you. Remember you are my cousin now—my very own near relation. It was Fate, you see, that made me so fond of you, from that first evening when you helped me so kindly with my German exercise.'

There was also a letter from Aunt Betsy, quite as affectionate, but in much fewer words, and more to the purpose.

'We shall drive over to see your father and mother as soon as we hear that they are disposed to receive visitors,' said Miss Wendover in conclusion.

'I wonder Miss Wendover did not say Sir Reginald and Lady Palliser,' observed Ida's step mother when she had read this letter.

The little woman had been devoting herself very earnestly to the perusal of books of etiquette—'The Upper Circles,' 'What is What,' 'The Crême de la Crême,' and works of a corresponding order, and was now much more learned in the infinitesimals of polite life than was Sir Reginald or his daughter. She had a profound belief in the mysterious authors of these interesting volumes.

'The "Crême de la Crême" must be right, you know, Ida,' she said, when some dictum was disputed 'for the book was written by a countess.'

'A countess who wears a shoddy tourist suit, and smokes shag, and sleeps in a two pair back in Camden Town, most likely,' said Sir Reginald' laughing.

The new baronet utterly refused to be governed by the hard and fast rules of the "Crême de la Crême." He daily did things which were absolute and awful heresies in the sight of that authority, and Lady Palliser was sorely exercised at her very first dinner-party by seeing the county people of Wimperfield setting at naught the precepts of the anonymous countess at every stage of the evening. They did those things which they ought not to have done, and

they left undone those things which they ought to have done, and, from the Countess's point of view, were utterly without manners.

But although Lady Palliser thought Miss Wendover's letter deficient in ceremony, she was not the less ready to welcome Ida's Kingthorpe friends; so a hearty invitation to dine and stay the night was sent to the Colonel and his wife, to Aunt Betsy, and as many of the junior members of the family as the biggest available carriage would hold.

It was the beginning of November when this visit occurred, but the foliage was still green on the elm tree tops, while many a lovely tint of yellow and brown still glowed on the woodland. The weather was balmy, sunshiny, the sky as blue as at Midsummer; and Ida, with her face as radiant as the sunlight, stood in the porch ready to welcome her friends when the wagonette drove up.

'Oh! but where are Blanche and Eva? and why did not the boys come?' she inquired, when she had shaken hands with the Colonel, and had been kissed and embraced by Mrs. Wendover, Aunt Betsy, and Bessie; 'surely they are coming too?'

'No, dear; I think we are quite a strong enough party as it is,' answered Mrs. Wendover.

'Not half strong enough! you have no idea what a barrack Wimperfield is—but Bessie knows, and ought to have told you. There are two-and-twenty bedrooms. It would have been a charity to have filled some of them. I am dreadfully disappointed!'

'Never mind, dear, you will see enough of them, depend upon it. But where is Brian?'

'Oh! it is one of his harrier days. He left all sorts of apologies for not being at home to receive you. He will be home before dinner. Here is mamma,' as Lady Palliser came sailing out, in a forty-guinea gown from Jay, all glitter of bugles, and sheen of satin, putting Mrs. Wendover's home-spun travelling dress to shame. There was a dinner gown with the luggage, but a gown which, in comparison with Lady Palliser's satin and jet, would be like the cloudy countenance of Luna on a November night, as compared with the glory of Sol on a Midsummer morning. But then, happily, Mrs. Wendover was not the kind of person to suffer at being worse dressed than her hostess. Lady

Palliser sank in a low curtsey when Ida murmured a rather vague presentation, and again beheld the Countess's eternal laws violated by her guests, for the Colonel and his wife shook hands with a vigour which in the 'Crême de la Crême,' was stigmatised as a barbarous vulgarity; while Aunt Betsy was so taken up with Ida that, after a smile and a nod, she actually turned her back upon the lady of the house.

'My poor child, how horridly ill you are looking,' Miss Wendover exclaimed, holding Ida by both hands and looking searchingly into her face. 'Prosperity has not agreed with you. I can see the traces of sleepless nights under your eyes.'

'It was such a shock,' murmured Ida.

'Yes, it was a terrible shock. Those fine frank young fellows! It was ever so long before I could get the images of them out of my mind. And I could not help feeling very sorry for them, in spite of your good fortune——'

'Don't call it my good fortune,' said Ida; 'I am glad my father is better off; but I was happier when I was poor.'

'And yet you used to say such bitter things about poverty?'

'Yes, I was a worshipper of Mammon in those days; but now I have got inside the temple and have found out that he is a false god.'

'He is not a god, but a devil. "The least erected spirit that fell from heaven." My poor Ida! And so you have found out that there are dust and ashes inside golden apples! Never mind; you will learn to enjoy the privileges and comforts of wealth better when you are better used to being rich. And in the meantime tell me that you are happy in your married life, that you and Brian are getting on pleasantly together.'

'We never quarrel,' said Ida, looking downward.

'Oh, that is a bad sign. Tell me something better than that.'

'You all told me that it was my duty to live with my husband. I am trying to do my duty,' Ida answered gravely.

There was no radiance upon her face now. All the happiness—the unselfish delight of welcoming her friends—had faded, and left her pale and despondent.

She threw off all gloomy thoughts presently, and was running about the house, showing her friends their rooms, giving directions to servants, making a good deal more fuss, and making more use of her own hands, than the author of 'La Crême de la Crême' would have tolerated.

'A lady's hands,' said that exalted personage, 'are not for use, but for ornament. Her first object should be to preserve their delicacy of form and colour; her second to be always *bien gantée*. She should never lift anything heavier than her tea-cup; and she should rather endure some inconvenience from cold while waiting the attendance of her footman than she should so far derogate from feminine dignity as to put on a shovel of coals. The rule of her life should be to do nothing which her domestics or her *dame de compagnie* can do for her.'

'My dearest Ida,' remonstrated Lady Palliser, remembering this classic passage, 'what do you mean by carrying that bag? Are there no servants in the house?'

'Half-a-dozen too many, mamma; but I like

to do something with my own hands for those I love.'

Lady Palliser sighed, recalling the days when she had cooked her husband's breakfasts and dinners, and had been happier—or so it seemed to her now—in performing that domestic duty than in giving orders to a housekeeper of whom she stood in awe. But Fanny Palliser had made up her mind that she ought to become a fine lady, in order to do credit to her husband's altered fortunes, and she was working assiduously with that intent.

The guests had arrived in time for luncheon, and after luncheon Lady Palliser and the three elders went for a long drive in the landau, to explore the best points in the surrounding scenery, while Ida and Bessie, with Vernon in their company, started for a long ramble in the Park and woods. The boy ran about hither and thither, flitting from bank to bank, in quest of flowers or insects, curious about everything in nature, vivid as a flash in all his movements. Thus the two girls were left very much to themselves, and were able to talk as they liked, only occasionally giving their attention to some newly-

discovered wonder of Vernon's, a tadpole in the act of shedding his horny beak, or some gigantic development of the genus toadstool, which species was just then in full season.

At first there was a shadow of constraint upon Bessie's manner; and in one whose nature was so frank, the faintest touch of reserve was painfully obvious. For a little while all her talk was of Wimperfield and its beauties.

'And to think that my dear old pet should be a leading member of our county families!' she exclaimed; 'it is too delightful!'

'Indeed, Bess, I am nothing of the kind. I am a very insignificant person—nothing but my father's daughter. Brian and I are only here on sufferance.'

'Oh, that's nonsense, dear. I heard Sir Reginald tell my father that Wimperfield was to be your home and Brian's as long as ever you both like—as long as your father lives, in fact. Brian can have his chambers in town, and work at his profession, but you are to live at Wimperfield.'

'That can hardly be,' answered Ida, gloomily; when Brian goes to London, I must go with him.

It will be my duty, you know,' with a shade of bitterness.

'Well, then, this will be your country house—and that will be ever so much better; for after all, you know, however delightful the country may be, it is rather like being buried alive to live in it all the year round. I suppose Brian will soon begin to work at his profession—to read law books, and wait for briefs, don't you know.'

'I hope so,' answered Ida, coldly; 'but I do not think your cousin is very fond of hard work.'

'Oh, but he must work—manhood demands it. He cannot possibly go on sponging upon your father for ever.'

'There is no question of sponging. Brian is welcome here, as you have heard. Lady Palliser likes him very much, and we all get on very well together.'

'But you would like your husband to work, wouldn't you, Ida?'

'I should like him to be a man,' answered Ida, curtly.

In all this time there had been no mention of that

other Brian—the owner of Wendover Abbey. No word of congratulation had come to Ida from him upon the change in her fortunes; nor had her husband told her of any communication from his cousin. She concluded, therefore, that Brian the elder had made no sign. It might be that he had dismissed her from his mind as unworthy of further thought or care. He had discovered her falsehood, her worthlessness, and she was no longer the woman he had once loved and honoured. She had passed out of his life, like an evil dream which he had dreamed and forgotten.

His voice had been silent when those other voices—the colonel's and the curate's—had told her that it was her duty to fulfil the vow she had vowed before God's altar: to share her husband's fate for good or ill. Brian, her lover of a few minutes before, had held his peace. What had he thought of her in those bitter moments? Had there been one touch of pity mingled with his scorn? She could not tell. He had made no sign.

From the moment of her friend's arrival she had tremulously expected some mention of Mr. Wend-

over's name; but that name had not been spoken. The silence was a relief: and yet she yearned to know something more: whether he had spoken of her with friendly feeling, whether he thought of her with compassion.

Not for worlds would she have questioned Bessie upon this subject: not even Bessie, whose childish love so invited confidence, before whose tender eyes she could never feel ashamed.

After that little talk about Brian Walford there followed a good deal of talk about Mr. Jardine. He was promised a living, not a big benefice by any means, but still an actual living and an actual Vicarage, in the vicinity of Salisbury Plain; and he and Bessie were to be married early in the following year, as soon as there were enough spring flowers to decorate Kingthorpe Church, the Colonel had said.

'It is to be in the time of daffodils, just before Lent,' said Bess; 'Easter comes late next year, you know.'

'I don't know; but no doubt you have found out all about it,' Ida answered, laughing. 'God bless

you, dear, and make your wedded life one long honeymoon!'

'I have seen marriages like that,' said Bess. 'Father and mother, for instance. They are always spooning. Oh, Ida! doesn't it seem dreadfully soon to be married?'

'There is plenty of time for reflection,' answered Ida, with a sigh.

Bessie remembered how sudden a thing matrimony had been in her friend's case.

'Ah, darling, I know what you are thinking about,' she said tenderly. 'You married on the spur of the moment, and were just a little sorry afterwards; but I have been so fenced and guarded by parental wisdom that I could not do anything foolish —if I tried ever so. And then John is far too wise to propose anything wild or romantic—yet I think if he had come to me and said, "There is a dog-cart at the gate, let us drive over to Romsey Church and be married," I should hardly have known how to say no. But, Ida, dear, tell me that your hasty marriage has turned out a happy one after all. Brian is so very nice. Confess now that you are happy with him!'

Bessie had intended scrupulously to avoid any such home question; but her feelings carried her away, directly she began to talk of John Jardine.

'I cannot tell you a lie, Bessie; no, my life is not a happy one. All colour and brightness, all youthfulness and fervour went out of me when I left Kingthorpe; but it is an endurable life, and I make the best of it.'

'Brian is not unkind to you, I hope,' cried Bessie, prepared to be indignant.

'No, he is not unkind. I have no complaint to make against him.'

'But surely he is nice,' argued Bessie; 'I have always thought him one of the nicest young men I know. He has very good manners, he knows a good deal, can talk of almost any subject, and he is full of life and spirits, when he wants to be amusing.'

'I have no doubt he is a very agreeable person,' answered Ida, gloomily. 'I have never disputed that. And yet our marriage was a mistake, all the same.'

'But when you married him, surely then you must have cared for him, just a little?'

'I thought I did. It was the glamour of his imaginary wealth. It was the worship of the golden calf, exemplified in one of its vilest phases, a mercenary marriage.'

'Do not lower yourself too much, dearest,' pleaded Bessie, hugging her friend's arm affectionately, as they tramped across the withered bracken. 'You are too good to have been governed by any sordid feeling. The delusion must have gone deeper?'

'It did. I married in a rhapsody of gratitude, thinking that I had found a modern Cophetua. Say no more about it, Bess, if you love me!'

'I will never say another word, dear,' sighed Bess; 'but I do wish you had been single when you met the other Brian, for I know he was more than half in love with you. And now he is going off to the other end of the world again, and goodness knows if he will ever come back.'

The upper tracts of heaven were beginning to grow grey, the sun was sinking in a bed of red and gold behind a clump of oaks on the edge of the horizon—the dark and delicate outline of leafless branches distinctly marked against that yellow light.

Wimperfield Park was almost at its best upon such an afternoon as this, the turf soft and springy after autumnal rains, the atmosphere tranquil and balmy, and all animal creation, deer, oxen, rabbits, feathered game, and an innumerable army of rooks, full of life and motion. Ida was slow to reply to Bessie's news about her cousin. The two girls walked on in silence for a little way, Vernon running ever so far ahead of them to look for fallen nuts in a grove of fine old Spanish chestnuts, which stood boldly out on the top of a hill.

'Don't you feel sorry that he is going away?' asked Bessie at last; 'just as he had established himself among us, and begun all kinds of improvements at the Abbey farm, and was even thinking of building new schools.'

'It is a pity,' said Ida.

'It is simply horrid. He is quite as bad as those Irish Absentees who are continually getting murdered; or he would be as bad, if he had not arranged with my father for the carrying on of all his plans while he is away.'

'That is very good of him.'

'Good, yes; but it will be a dreadful responsibility for poor father, and I daresay we shall all be worried about it. He will have builders on the brain till the work is finished. My poor John has promised to look after the schools; and he is so conscientious that he will wear himself to a shadow rather than neglect the smallest detail.'

'But are you not pleased that he can be of so much use?'

'I am obliged to be pleased. I am going to be a clergyman's wife; and I must teach myself to look at everything from the parochial point of view. John and I will not belong to ourselves, but to our parish. Our own pleasure, our own health, our own interests, must be as nothing to us. We must only exist as machines for the maintenance of the proper church services, and for the relief of the sick and poor.'

'If you think it too hard a life, dear, there is time for you to draw back!'

'Oh, Ida, do you think I am like Lot's wife, regretting the false frivolous world I am going to renounce. What life could be too hard, shared with *him*?'

'God bless you, dear. I believe your life will be a very happy one,' said Ida earnestly, and with a touch of melancholy. There was so much that was enviable in Bessie's fate. Then, after a pause, she said, hesitatingly, 'Do you know why your cousin is going to leave England?'

'No; I know no reason except his natural restlessness. He is a member of the Geographical, you know, and attends all their meetings. The other day he went up to hear some old fellow prose about the regions north of Afghanistan, and he was so interested that he made arrangements at once for an exploration on his own account. And I dare say he will get killed by some savage tribe, or die of fever.'

'He is not going alone, I hope?'

'No, he has a friend almost as mad as himself, and they are going together. That will mean two for the savages to kill instead of one; and I suppose they will have an interpreter and two or three servants, which will be a few more for the savages.'

'Let us hope they will not go into really dangerous places. There must be so much for a traveller to see in India, without running any great risks?' said Ida, affecting a cheerful tone.

'But you know English travellers love to run risks. It is their only idea of enjoyment. A man like Brian is told of some mountain, or some settlement where no Englishman has ever set his foot before, and he says "That is the very place for me," and the experiment naturally results in his getting murdered.'

They had finished their ramble, and were in front of the portico by this time.

'Oh, Bessie!' said Ida, with a stifled sob, 'life is full of sad changes. Do you remember that summer afternoon, three months ago, when Vernon and Peter stood on those steps bidding us good-bye, as we drove away with your cousin; and now those two are lying at the bottom of the sea, and he is going to the other end of the world.'

The Wendover visit was altogether a success. There was something so conciliating, so sympathetic, so entirely comfortable in Mrs. Wendover's nature and outward characteristics, that Lady Palliser felt almost immediately at her ease with her, and forgot her newly-acquired manners, becoming a good deal

more ladylike in consequence; since the strict and stern system of etiquette, formulated in the 'Crême de la Crême,' did not lie conformably to the original formation of the little woman's disposition. To be free and easy, loquacious, fussy, and kind was Fanny Palliser's nature, and she became odious when she tried to restrain those simple impulses by the armour of formal manners.

'I never had a lady friend I liked better than Mrs. Wendover,' she told Ida, in confidence, on the second day of the visit.

Fanny Palliser was not quite so much at ease with Aunt Betsy. She had an idea that the spinster was satirical, and was inwardly critical of her shortcomings. She was impressed by the wide extent of Aunt Betsy's information, most especially when that lady talked politics with Sir Reginald, and contrived to hem him into corners whence there was no logical thoroughfare. Aunt Betsy was liberal to the verge of Radicalism; Sir Reginald a Tory of the good old pig-headed type, who looked upon all advance movements as revolutionary, and thought that his own party had gone mad.

'I don't like strong-minded women,' Lady Palliser told Ida when the guests had left. 'I have no doubt Miss Wendover is very kind-hearted and generous—I'm sure her kindness to you was wonderful—but she is not *my* idea of a lady. That brocade dinner-gown was lovely, and fitted her like a glove; but the way she put her elbows on the table when she talked to Sir Reginald at dessert—well, I never did!'

Brian Walford had made himself particularly agreeable during the brief visit of his kindred—agreeable to both sides of the house. It was his desire to stand well with both. He wanted his uncle and aunts to see that he was thought much of at Wimperfield—that he was a valued member of the household, respected and liked by his wife's family, that he had done well for himself by his marriage, and that whatever cloud had overshadowed the opening of his wedded life had vanished altogether from his horizon. People so soon forgive and forget a little wrong-doing if the sinner comes comfortably out of his difficulties, and

becomes a prosperous member of society. The Colonel and his wife, who had always liked Ida, liked her all the better now that they saw her established in a stately home—the only daughter of a man of fortune and position.

On the morning of her departure, Miss Wendover contrived to have a little *tête-à-tête* with Sir Reginald; in the course of which she informed him that she meant to leave half her money to her niece Bessie, and the other half to her nephew—Brian Walford.

'The land, of course, will go to Brian of the Abbey,' she said. 'We Wendovers can't afford to divide the soil. Our chances of doing good in the land depend upon our having a large interest in the neighbourhood.'

'Why, Miss Wendover, I thought you were a Radical!' exclaimed Sir Reginald.

'So I am in many of my ideas, but not for cutting up the land into little bits, to pass from hand to hand like a ten pound note, until there should not be an estate left in England with a long family history, nor a rich man left in the rural districts to

take care of the poor. England would be badly off without her squirearchy.'

Sir Reginald and Miss Wendover were thoroughly agreed upon this point. He thanked her for her generous intentions towards her nephew; and he told her that he meant to provide fairly for his daughter. 'The entail expires in my person,' he said; 'I can do what I like for my girl. Of course the whole of the estate will go to Vernon. He is the last of his race, and I hope I may live to see him married, and the father of sons to inherit his name. It is a hard thing to think that a good old name must perish off the face of the land. However, I am free to make my will as I like, and I shall leave Ida six or seven hundred a year. She and Brian ought to get on very well with that, and his profession. I should like to see him a little more energetic—a little fonder of hard work,' pursued Sir Reginald, with a sigh, conscious of having never felt a strong inclination that way on his own part; 'but I suppose all young men are idle?'

'No, they are not,' retorted Aunt Betsy, sharply. 'There are workers and idlers in all families—men

born to honour or to dishonour—races apart—like the drones and the working bees. Look at my other nephew, for example; a man who has seven thousand a year, and not a creature to gainsay him if he chose to dissipate his days and nights on worldly pleasures. He is your true type of worker—a fine Greek scholar—a naturalist, a traveller, a thorough sportsman, where sport means courage, adventure, intelligence, endurance. Fortune made him a rich man, but he has made himself a man of mark in every circle in which he has ever lived, and I am proud to own him for my own flesh and blood. Nature gave Brian Walford many gifts, and what has he done for himself? Learnt to dress as foplings dress, and to think as foplings think!'

'He is a very nice young fellow!' said Sir Reginald kindly; 'we are all fond of him, only we think—for his own sake—it would be better if he took life more seriously.'

'He must be made to take life seriously, replied the spinster, sternly. 'Yes, he is very nice —that is the worst of it; if he were nasty no one would tolerate him. I'm afraid his good qualities

will be his ruin.' And thus, promising good things, yet prophesying evil, Miss Wendover left Wimperfield. Ida was to go and stay with her later on at the Homestead; when Brian Walford should be reading law in those new chambers which he often talked about. There were times when to hear him talk people thought him a youth gnawed and consumed by ambition, only panting for the opportunity to work.

Two days after the Wendovers' had gone back, Brian showed his wife a letter from his cousin, Brian of the Abbey.

'I am leaving England for a longer period than usual, and going farther afield,' wrote the master of Wendover Abbey; 'so before starting I feel myself bound to do something definite for you.'

'He has helped me with odd sums now and then, I suppose you know?' said Brian, as Ida read this passage.

'I did not know,' she answered coldly; 'but I am not surprised to hear that he has been generous to you.'

'No, he is your paragon—your preux chevalier—is he not?" sneered Brian. 'Bessie told me as much.'

'She told you only the truth. No one who lives at Kingthorpe can help knowing that your cousin is a good man.'

She went on with the letter.

'Now you are married the claims upon you will be larger than they have been, and I know you will not care to be a pensioner upon your father-in-law's bounty. I have, therefore, arranged with my bankers that you should draw on me quarterly for a hundred and fifty pounds while I am away. This will help you to keep the wolf from the door while you are reading for the Bar. I hope to find you a successful junior, in the first stage of a prosperous journey to the Bench, when I come back.'

'Six hundred a year. Not half bad, is it, Ida?'

'It is very good of him. I hope you will do as he suggests.'

'How do you mean?'

'Work hard at your profession.'

'I shall work hard enough,' answered Brian turning sullen, 'unless you all badger me. I hate being badgered.

CHAPTER II.

'ALL OUR LIFE IS MIXED WITH DEATH.'

FOUR years and more had gone, and there were changes at Wimperfield—changes at Kingthorpe. Death had come to the Georgian mansion among the wood-crowned hills. The easy-going master of that good old house had taken life a little too easily, had disregarded the warnings of wife and doctor, had dined and slept, and drunk his favourite wines—not immoderately, but with utter disregard of medical regimen—had neither walked, nor ridden, but had let life slip by him in a placid, plethoric self-indulgence—shunning all exertion, all pleasure even, if it were allied with activity of any kind. So, in an existence almost as sleepy as the spell-bound slumber in Beauty's enchanted palace, Ida's father had left the door of his mansion ajar to the fell visitor Death, and the fatal day had come

suddenly, with no more warning than Sir Reginald heard Sunday after Sunday in church, or read any evening in his favourite Horace, as he turned the carmine-bordered leaves of one of Firmin Didot's exquisite duodecimos, and mused pleasantly over the poet's perpetual variations upon the old theme—

'Brother, we must all die.'

The guest came like a thief in the night, and snatched his prey, in the midst of the family circle, in the leisurely lamplit hour after dinner, with the sound of gay voices and light laughter in the air. The senseless body breathed and throbbed for another day and another night: and then all was over—and Ida and her step-mother knelt side by side, clasped in each other's arms, by the clay which both had fondly loved.

They were alone in their sorrow. Brian was in London. Vernon was with Mr. and Mrs. Jardine, at their parsonage on Salisbury Plain, being prepared for Eton. The two women grieved together in a mournful solitude for the first day on which the house was darkened, and the presence of death was palpable in their midst.

Brian hurried down to Wimperfield directly the news reached him. He was agitated by the event, which had happened without any note of warning. He was not given to forecasting the future, and it had seemed to him that life at Wimperfield was to go on for ever in the same groove—immutable as the course of the planets; that he was always to have a luxurious home there—a fine stable—an indulgent father-in-law. He had been really fond of Sir Reginald, after his manner, and his sudden death shocked and grieved him. And then it gave a shade of uncertainty to his own future. He did not know how the estate might be left—how tied up and hedged round by executors and trustees, shutting him out of his present almost proprietorial enjoyment of the place. Some smug London lawyer, perhaps, would put his sleek paw upon everything during the boy's minority. Sir Reginald had never talked to Brian of his will.

The smug town lawyer came down, but not to impound Wimperfield—only to read the late baronet's will, which was entirely in harmony with the dead man's easy and generous temper.

He left his widow an annuity of fifteen hundred pounds, and the privilege of occupying Wimperfield until his son should come of age, and on leaving Wimperfield she was to receive the sum of two thousand pounds, to enable her to furnish any house she might choose to rent for herself. To his daughter he left any two horses she might select from the existing stud, and seven hundred a year in the Three per Cents., the principal to be divided among her children, if of age at the date of her death, or to be held in trust for them if under age. In the event of Vernon dying unmarried, Ida was to inherit everything; in the event of his marrying but having no children, his widow was to take the same annuity as that bequeathed to Lady Palliser, and the estate was to go to Ida, with reversion to her eldest son, or, in the event of no son, to her eldest daughter, whose husband was to take the name of Palliser. In this manner bad short-lived man endeavoured to make his name live after him.

Ida and her step-mother were left joint guardians of the boy, Vernon.

To Brian Walford Wendover, Sir Reginald bequeathed only his favourite hunter, a leash of clumber spaniels, and fifty pounds for a memorial ring. Mr. Wendover could not find fault with a will which left his wife seven hundred a year; but he felt that his position was diminished by his father-in-law's death, and he was morbidly jealous of the boy, who had absorbed so much of his wife's care and affection from the first hour of their coming to Wimperfield.

'I suppose we are to turn out now,' he said to Ida the night after the funeral, when they two were slowly and sadly pacing the terrace, in front of the drawing-room windows. It was the beginning of December—bleak, cheerless weather—and the woods looked black against a dull grey sky. There was only one feeble streak of pale yellow light in the west yonder, behind gaunt patriarchal oaks.

'Your father's will is a very handsome will,' continued Brian, 'but it leaves no provision for our living on here, and I suppose we shall have to clear out?'

'Leave Wimperfield! Oh, no, I'm sure Lady

Palliser has no idea of such a thing. Leave Wimperfield, and Vernon? He has a double claim upon me now, my fatherless darling.'

'Of course, Vernon is your first thought,' sneered Brian. 'But wouldn't it be just as well to think of ways and means? Who is to keep up Wimperfield? Lady Palliser, on her fifteen hundred a year; or you, on your seven hundred?'

'I can help mamma. She can have all my income, except just enough to buy my clothes; and my father gave me gowns enough to last for the next five years. But I heard the lawyer say that the place would be kept up for Vernie. Lady Palliser would hardly have any occasion to spend her income, except in paying for actual personal expenses, her own servants, and so on.'

'Good for Lady Palliser; but that doesn't make our position any more secure, if she should want to get rid of us?'

'I'm sure she will want us to stay. You ought to know her better than to suggest such a thing. You must know her affectionate nature, and how fond she is of us both.'

'I never presume to *know* anything of any woman. She seems to like us; but who can tell what may lurk under that seeming. She may marry again, and want to make a clean sweep of old associations.'

'Mamma! How can you think of such a horrid thing? No, she is as true as steel; she has been a good and loyal wife to my father.'

'That doesn't prevent her being good and loyal, to a second husband; nay, her very virtues—affectionateness, a soft clinging nature—point to the probability of a second marriage. It is just such women who fall into the adventurer's trap. However, we won't quarrel about her, and so long as she is cordial, and likes to have us here, Wimperfield can be our country house.'

This was a somewhat loose way of speaking, for Wimperfield had been Ida's only house during her married life. Brian had his chambers in the Temple at a rent of a hundred and twenty-five pounds a year, his sitting-room furnished with none of that spartan ruggedness which so well became George Warrington, of Pump Court, but in the willow-pattern and peacock-feather style of art; the dingy old walls glorified

by fine photographs of Gerôme's Roman Gladiators, Phryne before her judges, Socrates searching for Alcibiades at the house of Aspasia, and enlarged carbonized portraits of the reigning beauties in London society. But these chambers, though supposed to be devoted to days of patient work and much consumption of midnight oil, had served chiefly as a basis for late breakfasts, club-dinners, and theatre-going, while the midnight oil had been mostly associated with lobster salad at snug little suppers after the play. Ida had never been at these chambers, although she had been invited there frequently during the first few months of her husband's tenancy. As time went by Mr. Wendover found it was more convenient that his town and country residences should be completely distinct; and it had gradually become an accepted fact at Wimperfield that Temple Chambers were a kind of habitation which a man's wife could hardly visit without violating the first principles of legal etiquette.

Brian Walford was speedily reassured as to his position at Wimperfield. Lady Palliser clung to her step-daughter in her widowhood with a still warmer

affection than she had shown during her husband's lifetime. Ida was her adviser, her strong rock, her resource in all difficulties and perplexities, social or domestic. Nor would she allow her step-daughter or her step-daughter's husband to share the expenses of housekeeping at Wimperfield. The allowance for the young baronet's maintenance during his minority was large enough to cover all expenses of the very quiet household, likely to be even more quiet now that Sir Reginald Palliser, a man of particularly social habits, was gone.

Lady Palliser had never been able to feel thoroughly at home among the county people. Their language was not her language, nor their habits her habits. She could have got on ever so much better with them had they been less homely and free and easy in their ways. She had schooled herself in a politeness of line and rule, had learnt good manners by rote; and to find all her theories continually ignored or traversed was a perplexity and a trouble to her. If the county people had only treated her with the rigid stiffness enjoined in a three-and-sixpenny manual, she could have met

them upon equal ground. She could have remembered the social laws made and provided for her guidance as guest or hostess—how to enter and leave a room, in what attitude to stand or sit, with the fitting use of every item of table furniture, from the fish knife and fork to the salver of rose water. But when she beheld the county people doing outrageous things with their legs, and altogether heterodox in their way of eating and drinking, when she heard them talk very much as the 'lady friends' of her girlhood had talked over their wash-tubs, or kitchen ranges, yet with an indescribable difference, and never by any chance realizing her own innate ideas of company manners, Lady Palliser felt herself more and more at sea in this new world of hers. Thus it was that she fell into the way of letting Ida manage everything for her, and of meekly accepting such friends as Ida brought round her, and making much of those mothers whose boys were of an age to be play-fellows for her own beloved son.

And now the master of the house, the central figure in the family picture, was gone, and the two

women had to face life for the most part alone. Brian had grown fonder of London lately. He had held a few briefs during the last twelve months, and could plead business in the metropolitan law-courts as a reason for being very little at Wimperfield out of the hunting season. The boy was with the Jardines at Hopsley Vicarage, except during the happy interval of holidays. He was always glad to come home, but he was generally tired of home before the holiday was over, and went back to the Jardines with a keen delight which made his mother's heart ache.

Ida's character had ripened and strengthened in the years which were gone, years of quiet, submissive performance of duty. She had been a fond and obedient daughter, an almost adoring sister, a good and faithful wife. If she had not given her husband the love he had hoped to inspire, she had been more considerate, more sympathetic than many a wife who has married for love. She had never wounded him by hard words, had never exacted sacrifices from him, never pursued her own pleasure when it was at variance with his. She had long ago gauged his

shallow nature—she knew but too well that he was a reed, and not a rock, and that in all the trials of life she would have to stand alone; but if she sometimes inwardly scorned him, she never betrayed her scorn, either to him or to the world, after she had once made up her mind as to the nature of the bond between them, and the duties attached to that bond. With ripening years and growing wisdom she had atoned nobly for the errors of impulse and reckless anger.

Brian knew that she was good and loyal; but although he admired and respected her, he could not forgive her for that innate superiority which made him all the more conscious of his own shortcomings, for that growing strength of character which accentuated his own weakness. When the charm of novelty had departed, when the triumph of having won her in spite of herself was over, Brian Walford's love for his beautiful wife wore to a very thin thread. The tie was not broken, but it was sorely attenuated. He had never ceased to be jealous of the brother whom she loved so much more fondly than she had ever loved, or

even pretended to love, her husband; but he had left off expressing that jealousy in open upbraiding. Once he had been in the habit of saying, 'You will have a boy of your own some day, and then Master Vernie will be nowhere;' but that hoped-for son had never come, and Vernon was still all in all to his sister. Brian knew that it was so, and submitted to his lot in sullen acquiescence. After all, his marriage had brought him much that was good—had smoothed his pathway in life; and if—if, by-and-by, some such fatality as that which had cleared the way for Reginald Palliser, should clear the way for Ida, his wife would be the owner of one of the finest estates in Sussex. He wished no evil to the young baronet, he bore no grudge against him for Ida's idiotic fondness; but the fact remained that the boy's death would make Brian Walford Wendover's wife a rich woman. It is not in the nature of a man living among sharp-witted lawyers and men about town to ignore a fact of this kind. His friends had talked to him about it after the publication of Sir Reginald Palliser's will.

'A fine thing for you if that young gentleman were to go off the hooks,' said they; but Brian protested that he had no desire for such promotion. He was fond of the boy, and was very well satisfied with his own position.

'I daresay you do like the little beggar,' answered his particular friend, who was loafing away the earlier half of the afternoon in Mr. Wendover's chambers, smoking Mr. Wendover's cigarettes, and sipping Mr. Wendover's Apollinaris slightly coloured with brandy—a very modest form of entertainment surely, and yet the cigarettes and the superfine cognac, which were always on tap in Elm Court, made no small appearance in the accounts of tobacconist and wine merchant. 'You would be sorry if anything were to happen to him, no doubt; just as I shall be sorry when the governor bursts up—poor old fellow! But I know I want his money very badly; and I think you could spend a good deal more than your present income.'

Brian admitted with a light laugh that his capacity for expenditure was considerably in excess of his resources.

'You know how quietly I live,' he began.

'*Comme çi, comme ça*,' muttered his friend.

'And yet even now I am in debt.'

'And have been ever since I first knew you, and would be if you had fifty thousand a year!'

'Oh, that's inevitable' said Brian. 'A man with an income of that kind must always be in debt. He never can know when he comes to the boundary line. When a man starts in life by believing he is enormously rich, and can have everything he wants, he is pretty sure to go to the dogs. That's the way the sons of millionaires so often drift towards the gutter.'

CHAPTER III.

'FRUITS FAIL AND LOVE DIES AND TIME RANGES.'

BRIAN found Wimperfield duller as a place of residence after Sir Reginald's death; or it may be that he found London gayer, and his professional duties more absorbing. It was not often that his wife and mother-in-law were gratified by any public notification of his engagements; but now and then the name of Mr. Wendover appeared as junior counsel in some insignificant case, and Lady Palliser, who read the *Times* and *Post*, diligently apprised Ida of the fact.

'You see Brian is getting on quite nicely,' she said approvingly, 'and by-and-by when he has plenty of work, you will have a small house in town, I suppose,—somewhere about Belgravia—and only come to Wimperfield for your holidays.'

Fanny Palliser had never left off compassionating

Ida for her frequent separation from her husband. She had never divined that Ida was happier in Brian's absence than when he was with her. The wife had so borne herself that her husband should not be put to shame by her indifference. She lived the larger half of her life apart from him; but Lady Palliser and her gossips believed that in so doing the young couple sacrificed inclination to prudence. So soon as they could afford to maintain a town house they would have one.

It was Midsummer weather, and the rose garden at Wimperfield, that garden which had been Ida's own peculiar care for the last four years, the garden which she had improved and beautified with every art learned from that ardent rose-worshipper Aunt Betsy, was glorious with its first blooms. Sir Reginald Palliser had been dead a year and a half, but Ida still wore black gowns, and the widow had in no wise mitigated the severity of her weeds. The two women had lived peaceably and affectionately together ever since the baronet's death, leading a quiet but not unhappy life, the placid monotony of their existence agreeably varied by frequent intercourse with the family at Kingthorpe.

The only changes at The Knoll were of a gentle domestic character. No cloud of trouble had darkened that happy household. Bessie had become a brisk, business-like little matron, dividing her cares between her yearling baby and her husband's parish; troubled, like Martha, about many things, but only in such a manner as women of her temperament like to be troubled. Reginald had begun his University career as an undergraduate of Balliol, and talked largely about Professor Jowett, and Greek. Horatio was still a Wintonian. The Colonel had grown a little stouter, and his wife was too polite to cultivate a slimness which might have seemed a reproach to her husband's comfortable figure. Blanche was 'out,' a development of her being which meant that she was occasionally invited to a friendly dinner-party with her father and mother, that her clothes cost three times as much as they had cost while she was 'in,' that she had ideas about blue china and sunflowers, lamented the shabbiness of The Knoll drawing-room and the general untidiness of the household, and that she abandoned herself to

despondency whenever there was a long interval between one garden party and another. The child Eva had become exactly what Blanche had been four years ago. Urania was still Urania Rylance, just a shade more self-opinionated, and more conscious of the inferiority of her fellow-creatures. These innate instincts had been ripened and developed by several London seasons, and were now accompanied by a flavour of sourness which was meant for wit. She had not been without offers, but there had been no offer tempting enough to induce her to abandon her privileges as Dr. Rylance's daughter. She had an idea that her marriage would be the signal for Dr. Rylance to take unto himself a second wife; and she was disinclined to give that signal. The more anxious her father seemed to dispose of her in the marriage market, the more tenaciously she clung to the privileges of spinsterhood.

'I hope you are not in a hurry to get rid of me, father,' she said at breakfast one morning, when Dr. Rylance urged the claims of a cultured youth in the War Office.

'No, my dear; I don't think I have shown

any undue haste. This is your fifth London season.'

'I hope you do not call my intermittent glimpses of town a season,' sneered Urania.

'I have you here as often and as long as I can,' answered her father, becoming suddenly stony of countenance, 'and I take you out as much as I can. Mr. FitzWilson has seven hundred a-year. I could give you—say, three; and surely with a thousand a-year two young people might live in very good style—even in these pretentious days!'

'No doubt. But I don't care for Mr. FitzWilson, and I care still less for the kind of style which can be maintained upon a thousand a-year,' replied Urania, with the air of a duchess. 'That would mean a small house on the skirts of Regent's Park, or a flat in the Marylebone Road, I suppose—and no carriage.'

'Marry whom you please, my love, and when you please,' said her father; 'but remember that time is not standing still with any of us.'

There had been no change at the Abbey in the years which were gone since Brian Walford

claimed his bride, except that the new schools had been built under Colonel Wendover's superintendence. The old house still resembled the palace of the sleeping beauty; except that trustworthy servants took care of it, and kept moths, spiders, mice, and all such small deer at a distance. The owner of the mansion was still absent, roaming about somewhere in Northern India, as it was supposed; but his letters were few and far between. His kindred at Kingthorpe were accustomed to think of him as a wanderer in far-away places, and gave themselves very little anxiety about him. To have been anxious once would be to be anxious always, since a traveller's risks are manifold, and there is never a year when the eager spirit of some valiant explorer is not quenched in sudden death. Brian Wendover had been away so long that people had left off talking about him; and it seemed a natural condition for the Abbey to be tenantless —a capital place for picnics and afternoon teas. The Wendovers of The Knoll took all their visitors there as a matter of course—played tennis on the lawn between the goodly old cedars; and Blanche,

who was of a much more enterprising disposition than her sister Bessie, had tried her hardest to induce Mrs. Wendover to give a ball in the old refectory.

Ida and her husband were strolling about the rose-garden in the quiet hour after luncheon, while Lady Palliser dozed over her knitting-needles in her favourite chair by the long French window. Brian had come to Wimperfield somewhat unexpectedly, while the London season was still at its height, and all the law courts in full swing. He came home invalided, and wanting rest and care; but he refused to consult the family doctor, a general practitioner born and bred in the adjacent village,—clever, sagacious, homely in dress and manners, and, in the opinion of Lady Palliser, a tower of strength. She liked a fatherly doctor.

'What is the use of seeing old Fosbroke when I have had the best advice in London?' Brian said, peevishly, when urged by his mother-in-law to take advice from the family doctor. 'I know exactly what ails me—nervous exhaustion, an over-worked brain, and that kind of thing. I suppose it is

a natural consequence of modern civilization: men's brains have to go at express speed in order to keep pace with the average intelligence of the time.'

'If you had only a better appetite,' sighed Lady Palliser, who had been distressed at seeing her son-in-law send away plate after plate, with its contents hardly touched.

'I wouldn't mind having a bad appetite if I could sleep,' said he; 'it's insomnia that tells upon a fellow.'

Brian did not enter into the causes of this dire malady, which had begun with long nights given to dissipation—not to gross pleasures or vulgar companions, but to a semi-intellectual dissipation: wit, fun, copious talk about all things between heaven and earth, in the society of artists, actors, journalists, Bohemians of all the arts. To the man who begins by doing without sleep there sometimes comes a day when sleep will refuse to answer to his bidding. He has acquired the habit of perpetual wakefulness. The sleep-mechanism of the brain is out of gear. It will go for half-an-hour, perhaps, or for a few

minutes, in spasmodic jerks: and then it stops all at once, as if the machinery had gone wrong.

So it was with Brian. Those festive nights given over to the feast of reason and the flow of soul—not to riot or drunkenness, but to the half-unconscious consumption of much brandy and soda—nights in which the atmosphere seemed charged with wit and wisdom as with mental electricity—nights in which a young man, able to talk smartly upon any given topic, was carried away by the consciousness of his power, and thought himself a god.

Brian was a member of all those joyous clubs—the night-flowers of the club world, which unfold their petals in the small hours, when the playhouses are shut, and the lights have been extinguished in all sober households. There was no offence in any of these institutions, and they offered a fine intellectual arena, afforded a splendid training for literary youth: but to a man who loved them too well they meant a shattered constitution.

Brian had come to Wimperfield in the hope that quiet and country air would bring back sleep to his eyelids, and steadiness to his nerves; but he had

been there a week, and his hand was no steadier, his nights were no less wakeful. He fancied himself growing weaker day by day, and although the great authority in Harley Street had strictly forbidden any stimulant except one glass of stout with his mutton chop at luncheon, Brian, who was quite unable to eat the chop, found it impossible to lunch without plenty of dry sherry, or to dine without champagne, and after dinner drank a good deal of that fine old port which had been laid down by old Sir Vernon Palliser in forty-seven.

Ida was very kind and gentle to her husband at this time, seeing that he was really in need of her tenderness. She devoted herself to his amusement, walked with him, rode with him, drove with him; but although he was grateful, he was not happy. A terrible depression of mind, broken by flashes of hilarity, had taken possession of him. The London physician had told him frankly that his nerves were shattered, but that all would be well with him if he left off all stimulants, ate chops and steaks, and lived in the open air; but as yet he had been unable to cope with the most diminutive chop, or to

exist for three hours without stimulants. Even those rides and drives with Ida seemed a weariness to him, and he would have escaped them if he could.

This afternoon he paced the rose-garden listlessly by Ida's side, smoking a cigarette—that cigarette which was rarely absent from his lips.

'Are you sure your London doctor does not object to your smoking so much?' Ida asked presently, noting the languid uncertainty of the fingers which held the cigarette.

'I am not sure about anything. I told him I could not live without tobacco, and he said I might smoke two or three cigarettes in the course of the day——'

'Oh, Brian, and you smoke——'

'Two or three dozen! Not quite so bad as that, eh? But no doubt I do go considerably outside the medico's mark. I could no more exist by line and rule in that way than I could fly. No, if I am to die of tobacco and late hours, I am doomed.'

'But there is no such thing as being doomed; every man is his own master—he can mould his life as he likes.'

'Can he? That depends upon the man. I am not going into the mystery of fate and free will. There is the question of temperament—hereditary instinct. If I cannot have intellectual society—new ideas—variety—I must die. I could not lead the life you live here—not life, but stagnation.'

'I have the books I love, this dear park, and all the lovely country round us—horses—dogs—and some very pleasant neighbours; and I try to do a little good in my generation.'

'All very well; but you are as much out of the world as if you were in the centre of Africa. I could not exist under such conditions. Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay. This to me would be as bad as Cathay. But now I suppose you are going to be perfectly happy, now that your brother is coming home.'

'Yes. I am always happy, when I have him—he is more and more companionable every day of his life.'

Vernon was expected that afternoon. He was coming home for a summer holiday, just when summer was at her loveliest. He was not bound by

public school rules, or obliged to wait for the stereotyped watering-place season. The Jardines were to bring him over this afternoon, and were to stay at Wimperfield for a couple of days. Ida glanced towards the avenue every now and then, expecting to catch a glimpse of the approaching carriage between the leafy elms.

Brian strolled by her side with a listless air, smoking, and murmuring a few words now and then for courtesy's sake. He had very little to say to his wife. She did not care for the things he cared for, or understand the kind of life he lived. She loved books, the books which are for all time; he was a mere skimmer of books and reviews—mostly reviews; and he cared only for new books, new ideas, new theories, new paradoxes. His cleverness was the cleverness of the daily press—the floating froth upon the sea of knowledge. He liked to talk to a man of his own stamp, with whom he could argue upon equal terms; but not to a woman who had steeped her mind in the wisdom and poetry of the past.

He stifled a yawn every now and then, in that half-hour of waiting, longing to go back to the

dining-room and refresh his parched lips with the contents of a syphon dashed with brandy. He had given his own orders to the butler, and the spirit stand was always on the sideboard ready for his use. The butler had made a note of the brandy which was dribbled away in this desultory form of refreshment, and had made up his own mind as to Mr. Wendover's habits; but it is a servant's duty to hold his peace upon such matters.

At last there came the sound of wheels, and Ida flew round to the portico to receive her guests, Brian following at his leisure. The slender figure in the black gown reminded Brian of those old days by the river—the tranquil October afternoons—the clear light—the placid water—a gray river under a gray sky, with a lovely line of yellow light behind the tufted willows. How happy he had been in those days!—caring nothing for the future—bent on winning this girl at any price—laughing within himself at her delusion—trusting to his own merits as an ample set-off against his empty purse when he should stand revealed as the wrong Brian.

Things had gone fairly enough with him since then. He had had plenty of pleasure; a good deal of money, though not half enough; and very little work. And yet he felt that his life was a failure—and he was languid and old before his time. An idle life had exhausted him sooner than other men are exhausted by a hard-working career. He knew of men at the bar who had lived hard and worked like galley slaves, and who yet retained all the fire and freshness of youth.

The guests had alighted by the time Brian reached the portico, and Vernon was in his sister's arms. She held him away from her, to show him to her husband—a thin fair-haired boy of eleven, in a gray highland kilt and jacket, like a gillie—fresh rosy cheeks, bright blue eyes.

'Hasn't he grown, Brian? and isn't he a darling?' she asked, hugging him again.

'He is a jolly little fellow, and he shall go out shooting with me as soon as there is anything to shoot.'

'We can fish,' said Vernon, 'there's plenty of trout; but you don't look strong enough to throw a

fly. My rod's ever so heavy,' he added, with a flourish of his arm.

That weakness and languor, which was obvious even to the boy, was still more apparent to Mr. and Mrs. Jardine. Bessie had not seen her cousin since Christmas, when he and Ida had spent a couple of days at Kingthorpe.

'Oh, Brian,' she exclaimed, 'have you been ill? Nobody told me anything.'

'I have had no illness worth telling about; but I have not been in vigorous health. London life takes too much out of a man.'

'Then you should not live in London. You ought to be out all day, roaming about on those pine-clad hills yonder—"hangers," I think you call them in these parts.'

'Yes,' answered Ida, 'we are very proud of our hangers; but Brian is not able to walk much just yet.'

Bessie was full of concern for Brian after this. She devoted herself to him in the interval before dinner, and left Ida free to roam about the garden with Vernie. She remembered how he had always been

her favourite cousin. She had been angry with him for allowing that foolish practical joke of hers to take so fixed and fatal a form; but now she saw him wan and broken-looking she was prepared to forgive him everything.

'You must take care of yourself, Brian,' she said, when they were sitting side by side in one of the drawing-room windows, while Lady Palliser dispensed afternoon tea.

'I am taking care of myself; I am here for that purpose; but it is dreary work.'

'What, dreary work to live in this lovely place, and with such a sweet wife! But I know you never liked the country.'

'I frankly detest it.'

'And you miss the intellectual society to which you are accustomed in London—literary men—poets—playwrights. How delightful it must be to know the men who write books!'

'They are not always the pleasantest people in the world. I never cared much for your deep-thinker—the man who believes he is sent into the world to promulgate his own particular gospel. But

the men who write for newspapers—critics, humourists—they are jolly fellows enough.'

'And you have glorious nights at your clubs, don't you? We had a friend of John's with us the other day who had met you at some literary club near the Strand. Do you ever sing comic songs now?'

'Sometimes, after midnight. One does not feel moved to that kind of thing till the small hours.'

'Ah!' sighed Bessie, 'our only idea of the small hours is getting up at four, to be ready for a five o'clock service. But I don't think the small hours agree with you, Brian. You are looking ten years older than when you were at Kingthorpe last summer.'

'Better wear out than rust out,' said Brian.

After dinner Vernie was eager for an exploration of the village, and Blackman's Hanger, the wild, pine-clad hill which sheltered the village from north-east winds and the salt breath of a distant sea.

Ida was ready to go with him, and the Jardines, always tremendous walkers, were equally anxious for a ramble; but Brian was much too languid for evening walks.

'I'll stay and smoke my smoke and talk to the Mater,' he said, always contriving to keep on pleasant terms with Lady Palliser; 'I hate bats, owls, twilight, and all the Gray's Elegy business.'

'But you stop such a time over your cigar,' said the widow. 'Last night I sat for an hour waiting tea for you. I like company over my cup of tea.'

'To-night you shall have the advantage of intellectual society,' said Brian. 'I will come and dribble out my impressions of the last *Contemporary Review*, which I dozed over between breakfast and luncheon.'

Brian stayed in the dining-room, dimly lighted by two hanging moderator lamps, while the soft shades of evening were just beginning to steal over the landscape outside. He had his favourite pointer for company—the last Sir Vernon's favourite, a magnificent beast, and of almost human intelligence, and he had plenty of wine in the decanters before him—choice port and claret, which had been set on the table in honour of the Jardines, who had hardly touched it. He had his cigarette case and his

own thoughts, which were idle as the smoke-wreaths which went curling up to the ceiling, light as the ashes of his tobacco.

Out of doors the evening was divine. Vernon was delighted to be frisking about upon his patrimonial soil. The five years he had lived at Wimperfield seemed the greater half of his life—seemed, indeed, almost to have absorbed and blotted out his former history. He remembered very little of the shabbier circumstances of his babyhood, and had all the feelings of a boy born in the purple, to whom it was natural to be proprietor of the landscape, and to patronize the humbler dwellers on the soil.

Blackman's Hanger was a rugged ridge of hill above the village of Wimperfield. They lingered here to listen to the nightingales, and to admire the sunset; and then, when the glow above the western horizon was changing from golden to deepest crimson, they all went down into the village, where lights were beginning to glimmer faintly in some of the cottages.

Wimperfield was a snug primitive settlement, consisting of about five-and-twenty habitations,

not one of which had been built within the last century, a general shop, a bakery, and three public-houses, a fact which shows that the brewing interests were well protected in this part of the world. One of these village taverns, a dingy old low-browed cottage, with a pile of out-buildings which served for stable, piggery, or anything else, and about half an acre of garden, stood a little way aloof from the village, and on the skirt of the copse that clothed the sloping steep below Blackman's Hanger. There was a piece of waste land in front of this inn which served as the theatre for such itinerary exhibitors, Cheap Jacks, and Bohemians of all kinds who took quiet little Wimperfield in the course of their perambulations.

Here to-night in the dusk, there stood a covered cart of the peddler order, and Vernon, who had been walking on in front with Mr. Jardine, rushed back to his sister to say that there was a Cheap Jack in front of the Royal Oak.

'Oh, he has been there for a long time—ever since the beginning of the year,' said Ida; 'he is quite an institution.'

'What's an institution?' asked Vernon.

'Something fixed and lasting, don't you know. I believe he does no end of good among the villagers—doctoring them, and advising them, and helping them when they are ill or out of work; but he has a very churlish way with the gentry. Mr. Mason, our curate, says the man always reminds him of the Black Dwarf, except that he is not so ugly, nor deformed in any way.'

'Then he can't be like the Black Dwarf,' said Vernon, who knew almost all Sir Walter's novels, his sister having read Shakespeare, Scott, and Dickens to him for hours on end, during the long winter evenings at Wimperfield.

'Does he live in that cart always?' asked Bessie.

'Not always, he has taken possession of that dilapidated cottage upon the Hanger, which used to be occupied by Lord Pontifex's gamekeeper, and I believe he oscillates between the cart and the cottage. I have hardly seen him, for he is such a morose personage that he always hides when any of the gentry approach his hut.'

'Sulks in his tent, like Achilles,' said Mr. Jardine.

They were on the edge of the little patch of green by this time. The cart—painted a lively yellow, and with a little window on each side—stood in the middle of the green, backed by a clump of tall elms. There was a little crowd in front of the cart, and a man with a black beard and a red fez cap was discoursing in a deep, sonorous voice to the assembly—descanting, with seeming fluency, upon a picture which he held in his hand, his tawny, gipsy-like face only half shown by the flame of a flaring naphtha lamp, and his features rendered grotesque by the play of lights and shadows. The party from the Park, however, had very little opportunity for seeing what manner of man he was; for no sooner did he catch sight of Mr. Jardine's tall hat over the circle of rustic heads, than he flung the engraving he had been exhibiting inside the cart, extinguished his lamp, wished his audience an abrupt good night, and shut the door of his dwelling upon the outside world.

The rustics gave him a round of applause before

they dispersed. The women and children moved towards the village; the men and lads lingered a little on the green, irresolute, and then slowly gravitated to the 'Royal Oak,' touching their hats as they passed the gentlefolks. Mr. Jardine stopped one of the men midway.

'A curious customer that,' he said, looking towards the cart.

'Yes, sir, so he be; but rale right down clever.'

'Was he trying to sell you that picture?'

'No, sir; him don't often sell things to we; sometimes him do — knives, and comforters, and corderoy waistcoats, and flannel shirts, and such like, and oncommon good they be, too, and oncommon cheap. He wor givin' we a bit of a lecture loike, on lions, and tigers, and ryenosed-horses, and such-like beasts, and on they queer creatures wot lived before the flood. Lord! there was one beast with a long neck, and paddles for swimmin' with, as made we all ready to bust with laughin' when him showed us the pictur' of his skeleton.'

'Does he often give you a lecture of that kind?'

'Yes, sir; him do lecture we about all manner o' things—flowers, and ferns, and insects—kindness to hanimals—hinstinct in dogs—lord knows what; but he have a way of makin' it all go down—much better nor parson; and he allus gets a good laugh out o' we. And when there's any on us ill, or out o' work, then Cheap Jack be a real good friend, and very ready with the brass.'

'But can he afford to help you? is he so much better off than you are?'

'Well, sir, you see him haven't got no missus nor young 'uns, and I fancy him's got a few pounds saved in a old stocking. Him don't drink, nayther—not so much as a mug o' beer.'

'Is he a native of these parts?'

'Lor no, sir, him's a furriner; why, his skin's as brown as a berry!'

'Is he a gipsy, do you think?'

'I ain't sure o' that, but him can talk their patter; and when the gipsies come this way him and them is as thick as thaves.'

'I see—half a gipsy and half a foreigner, and altogether a rover, I suppose. Well, I'm glad he

gives you a little instruction and amusement now and then, and I hope he'll find the way to keep you out of the public-house,' said Mr. Jardine.

'Why, you see, parson, a man must have his mug o' beer; but it's summot to the good if he don't sit down over it, and make it three or four mugs o' beer. There ain't been so much sitting down since Cheap Jack comed among us.'

'Isn't that a desolate hovel up on the hill where he lives sometimes?'

'It was oncommon deserlate till Cheap Jack took it in hand; there ain't a owl in the wood that would have liked to live in it; but Jack hammers a bit of wood here, and a plank there, and a bit o' matting up agen the walls, and puts in a stove from Petersfield, and makes it as snug as a burd's nest. I've smoked many a pipe with him alongside that stove, and drank many a cup o' coffee. That's Jack's drink—not a drain o' beer or sperrits ever goes inside o' he.'

'That accounts for the money in the stocking,' said Bessie.

The rustic shook his head dubiously,

'Him ain't got no childer,' he said. 'It's them as makes the coin go.'

'I wish he'd come out again and go on lecturing,' exclaimed Vernon, with an aggrieved air. 'I do so want to hear him.'

'Oh, but him won't show the end of his nose now you're here, Sir Vernon,' answered the rustic. 'Him can't abide gentlefolks. Parson ha' tried his hardest to get round he, but Jack shuts the door in parson's face. Him don't want nothing of 'em, and don't want their company.'

'A natural corollary,' said Mr. Jardine, laughing. 'But I'm afraid your friend is a desperate radical.'

'Well, I don't know, sir. Him don't speak hard agen the Queen; him don't want to do away with soldiers and sailors, like grocer down street; and though Jack don't go to church, Jack reads his Bible, and holds by his Bible. I fancy as some rich gentleman must ha' done he a great injury once upon a time, and that it turned he agen the breed.'

'Very like the Black Dwarf,' said Mr. Jardine to Ida. 'I daresay I shall hear of your playing the part of Isabella Vere, and interviewing this

half-savage, half-christian recluse. But do you mean to tell me that he has lived here six months, within a mile and a half of your house, and you have never seen him?'

'It is a fact. You had a specimen of his manners just now. Whenever I have passed his cottage he has shut the door or the window in my face, if he happened to be standing at either. To Mr. Mason he has been absolutely rude.'

'It isn't every man who appreciates the privilege of being interviewed by a parson,' said John Jardine.

'Oh, Jack,' cried Bessie! 'all your people love to see you at their doors.'

'Yes, they are a sociable lot. That comes from living on Salisbury Plain, far from the madding crowd.'

After this they went home, watching the golden summer moon rise above the pine-clad Hanger as they went. They found Lady Palliser nodding in her arm-chair in front of the low tea table, the teapot still intact. It was ten o'clock, but Brian had not come in to talk to her after her tea. John Jardine went in quest of him, and found him in the

dining-room, mooning over his wine. He murmured a vague excuse about feeling too tired to talk to anybody, and then bade Mr. Jardine good night, and went up to his room; not to sleep, but to fling the window wide open, and lean his elbows on the sill, and stare out into the exquisite summer night, the leafy wood, the moon-kissed crest of the hill, in a half-dreamy, half-hysterical state of mind.

'I begin to think I am like Swift, and shall go first at top,' he said to himself; 'this quiet life is killing; and yet if I was to go back I should be worse. The nights in Elm Court, when I went home alone after a glorious evening, were devilish.'

CHAPTER IV.

'MY SEED WAS YOUTH, MY CROP WAS ENDLESS CARE.'

Mr. and Mrs. Jardine went back to their Wiltshire parsonage after a two days' visit, and Ida had her boy all to herself. His education, from a classical and mathematical point of view, had only begun when he went to John Jardine; but the foundations of education, the development of thought and imagination had begun long ago at Les Fontaines, when Ida and he took their long wintry rambles together, and the girl talked to the child of all things in heaven and earth, imparting in the easiest way much of that information which she had acquired as pupil and teacher in the educational mill at Mauleverer. Beyond learning to read and to write, and the most elementary forms of arithmetic, this oral instruction was all the education which Vernie had received up to the time of

his leaving home; but then what a large range of information can be imparted by an intelligent woman who reads a great deal, and who reads with the student's deep love of knowledge. Vernon, without being a prodigy, like the infant Goethe, or that wondrous product of paternal scholarship, John Stuart Mill, knew more about things in general, from the course of the planets to the constitution of the glowworms in the hedges, than many full-grown undergraduates. Flowers and ferns, shells and minerals, had been his playthings. His sister had taught him the nature and attributes of all the animals and birds he loved, or slaughtered; and then his imagination had been fed upon Shakespeare and Scott, Dickens and Goldsmith. He had derived his first vivid impressions of history from Shakespeare and Scott, his knowledge of a wide range of life outside his own home from Dickens; and with that knowledge a quickened sympathy with the joys and sorrows of the humbler classes. All that Vernon knew of the struggles of the lower middle classes was derived from that great panorama of life which

Charles Dickens painted for us. His own small experiences of village life had taught the boy very little; for he had only seen the rustic from that outside and smoothly varnished aspect which the tiller of the soil presents to the squire.

And now the boy had come home, after an absence of some months, and he wanted to absorb Ida from morning till night. She must walk and drive with him, read to him, play with him, be interested in his dogs, his guns, his fishing-tackle, every detail of his busy young life.

Ida was never happier than when thus occupied. The boy seemed to her the incarnate spirit of youth, and joy, and hope, and all those bright impulses which wear out in ourselves at so early a stage of life's journey that we are very glad to taste them vicariously in the unspoiled ardour of childhood. To be with Vernon was to escape from the narrowness of her own fettered life, to forget its disappointments, its disillusions, its one deep incurable regret—regret for her own mad folly, which had bartered freedom for a sordid hope —folly as mad as Esau's when he sold his

birthright—regret for him who loved her too late.

Unhappily, even her unselfish delight in her brother's society was not unalloyed with pain. She never forgot her duty as a wife, nor failed in any act of attention to her husband. And yet Brian's morbid jealousy of the boy was but too evident. He rarely spoke of Vernon without a sneer, when he and his wife were alone ; although he was careful not to say anything uncivil before Lady Palliser. He scoffed at the little lad's position, as if it had been an offence in the child himself —called him the microscopic baronet, the baby thane, laughed with bitterest laughter at any little touch of arrogance which clouded the natural sweetness of the boy's character.

Ida endured this morbid jealousy with a patience that was almost heroic. She saw that her husband was ill, and that this mysterious malady of his, which had at first seemed to her sheer hypochondriasis, was only too real. It was a malady which affected the mind more than the body. Brian's character had undergone a complete

change since his illness. He who had been of old so easy-tempered, so lively, was now melancholy and irritable, at times garrulous to a degree that was painful to his hearers, keenly resentful of trifles, always fancying himself neglected or slighted.

In vain did Lady Palliser and Ida urge the necessity of medical advice. Brian obstinately refused to see the local apothecary ; and, as there was nothing tangible in his illness, and he was able to be about all day, to go out of doors, and do pretty much as he pleased, there was no excuse for calling in the doctor without his permission.

'If I felt that I wanted advice, I would go up to town and see Mallison,' he said ; 'but there is nothing amiss with me, except a disappointed life. I begin to feel that I am a failure. Other fellows of my age have passed me in the race ; and it is hard at nine-and-twenty to feel oneself beaten.'

'But, Brian,' his wife answered gently, 'don't you think if your contemporaries have outstripped you, it is because they have tried harder than you ? Remember what St. Paul says about the one who obtaineth the prize.'

'For Heaven's sake, don't preach!' cried Brian, irritably. 'I tell you I tried hard enough; tried—yes, slaved night after night; scribbling articles for those infernal magazines, to get my manuscript returned with thanks after nearly a twelvemonth's detention; spelling over dry-as-dust briefs for a guinea fee, in order to post up some bloated Queen's Counsel, who treated me as if I was dirt, and pretended not to know my name. I tell you, Ida, the Bar is a sickening profession; literature is worse; all the professions are played out. Europe is overcrowded with educated men; they swarm like aphids in a hot summer—your single fly the progenitor of a quintillion of living creatures. When I see the men in their wigs and gowns, hurrying up and down the Temple courts, swarming on all the staircases, choking up the doors of the law-courts, they remind me of the busy, hungry creatures on an ant-heap.

"Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys,

Every gate is thronged with suitors, all the markets overflow."'

He was walking up and down the room in an agitated way, angry, excited beyond the occasion.

'But in your case, Brian, it seems to me that the path has been made so smooth. With such an independence as ours, it must be so easy to get on.'

'I thank you for reminding me how much I owe your father,' sneered her husband.

'I was not thinking especially of my father. You owe as much to your cousin.'

'Yes, my cousin has been vastly generous—damnably generous; but if I had married any other woman, do you suppose he would have done as much? Of course, I know it was for your sake he gave me that income. Was he ever so liberal before, do you think? No, he dribbled out an occasional hundred or two when I was up a tree, but nothing more. It was for your sake his purse-strings relaxed.'

'You have no right to say that,' Ida answered indignantly.

'I have a right to say what I think to my wife.

I have not forgotten what you said to me at the hotel that day. You told me to my face that you loved another man. Do you think I was such a dullard as not to guess that man's name? You fell in love with Wendover, of the Abbey, before you saw him; and your innocent love for the shadow grew into guilty love for the man, after you were my wife. I knew all about it; but I was not going to let you give me the slip. I have known all along that I am nothing to you, that you despise me, detest me, perhaps; and that knowledge has made me what I am—a broken, blighted man, a wreck, at nine-and-twenty.'

'Oh, Brian, this is too cruel. Have I ever failed in my duty to you?'

'Damn duty!' cried Brian savagely. 'I wanted your love, not your duty—love such as I thought you gave me in those autumn days by the river. Great God, how happy I was in those days! I hadn't a sixpence; I was up to my eyes in debt; but I thought you loved me, and that we were going to be happy in our garret till good fortune tumbled down the chimney.'

'I don't think a garret would have suited you long, Brian, had I been ever so devoted. You are too much of a sybarite.'

'I should have been happy with you. I should have thought myself in Eden. Well, fate never meant me to be happy. I am a wretch, judged before I was born, foredoomed to misery in this world and the next. Yes, I begin to think Calvin was right—there are some creatures predestined to damnation. Before ever the stars spun into their places, when all the suns and moons and planets were rings of fiery gas revolving in space, my doom was already written in the book of fate.'

It had been a common thing of late for Brian to ramble on in such despondent strains as these, half angry, half despairing. Ida was supremely patient with him, sometimes soothing him, sometimes arguing with him; yet hardly knowing how much of his talk arose from real gloom of mind, or how much was sheer rhodomontade. The hours which she spent with him were intensely painful, and as the days went by he became more and more exacting, more

and more resentful of her absence, and grudgingly jealous of Vernon.

Another cause for pain was Ida's growing conviction that her husband's frequent doses of soda and brandy, and the champagne which he drank at dinner, and the port or Burgundy which he took after dinner, had a great deal to do with his altered mental condition. Painful as it was to speak of such a thing, she took courage one morning, and told him plainly that she believed he was suffering from the effect of habitual—almost unconscious—intemperance.

'You are taking soda and brandy all day long. You have brandy in your bedroom at night, Brian,' she said. 'I'm sure you can have no idea how much you take in the course of the twenty-four hours.'

'I have no idea that I am a drunkard, if that's what you mean,' he answered, white with rage; and then he burst into a torrent of abuse—such language as she had never heard from mortal lips until that hour, and his wife fled, shuddering and terror stricken, from the room.

When next they met he cowered before her with a craven air, and made no allusion to this scene But after this she observed that he pretended to drink less, and had a crafty way of getting his glass refilled at dinner. He no longer kept a brandy bottle on the table beside his bed, as he had done heretofore, on the pretence that a little weak brandy and water helped him to sleep, nor did the soda-water bottles and spirit decanter adorn one of the tables in his study; but more than once his wife met him creeping to the dining-room with a stealthy air to supply himself at the sideboard, and when she went into his room at night to see if he slept, his fevered breath reeked of brandy. It seemed to her later, as time went on, that even his garments exhaled spirituous odours.

It was not long after this that he began to talk mysteriously of some trouble which menaced him, which gradually took the shape of a criminal prosecution overhanging him. He had been falsely accused of some awful crime—some nameless unpeakable offence—hateful as the gates of hell. He was innocent, but his enemies were legion; and at

any moment a detective might be sent to Wimperfield to arrest him. One evening, in the summer twilight after dinner, he took it into his head that one of the footmen—a man whose face ought to have been thoroughly familiar to him—was a detective in disguise. He flew at the worthy young fellow in a furious rage, and the butler had hard work to prevent his doing poor John Thomas a mischief. But when the lamps were brought in, Brian preceived his mistake, and apologised to the footman for his violence.

'You don't know what devils those detectives are,' he said deprecatingly; 'they can make themselves look like anybody. And if they once get hold of me, the case will be tried at Westminster Hall. It will take weeks to try, and all the Bar will be engaged; and then it will have to go to the House of Lords. There has not been such a case within the last century. All Europe will ring with it.'

'Dear Brian, I am sure this is a delusion of yours,' said Ida, trying to soothe him; 'you cannot have done anything so wicked.'

'Done! no, I am as innocent as a baby; but the whole Bar—the Bench too—is in league against me. They'll make out their case, depend upon it. "It's a case for a jury;" that's what the Lord Chancellor said when I told him about it.'

After this there could be no doubt that there was actual mental disturbance. Lady Palliser sent for the local medical man, who had very little difficulty in diagnosing the case. Sleeplessness, restless nights, tossing from side to side, an utter inability to keep still, horrible dreams, impaired vision, clouds floating before the eyes,—these symptoms Mr. Fosbroke heard from the wife. The patient himself was obstinately silent about his sensations, declared that there was nothing the matter with him, and let the doctor know he considered his visit an impertinent intrusion.

'I had a touch of brain fever early in the year,' he said. 'I had the best advice in London during my illness, and afterwards. I know exactly how to treat myself. The symptoms which alarm my wife are nothing but the natural reaction after a severe shock to the nervous system.

The tonics I am taking will soon pull me up again; but as I am now under a special treatment by Dr. Mallison, of Harley Street, you will understand that I don't care about further advice.'

'Undoubtedly,' replied the medical man meekly. 'But I believe it would be a satisfaction to Lady Palliser and to Mrs. Wendover both if you would do me the honour to consult me, and allow me to look after you while you are here. I could place myself under Dr. Mallison's instructions, if you like.'

'No, there is no necessity. I tell you I know exactly what is amiss, and how to manage my own health.'

Mr. Fosbroke argued the point, but in vain. Brian would not even allow him to feel his pulse. But the doctor knew very well what was amiss, and told Mrs. Wendover, with delicate circumlocution, that her husband was suffering from an imprudent use of stimulants for some time past.

'That is what I feared,' said Ida; 'but it is too dreadful. It is the very last thing I expected. I thought nobody drank nowadays.'

'Very few people get drunk, my dear Mrs. Wendover,' replied the doctor; 'but unhappily though there is very little drunkenness, there is a great deal of what is called "pegging"—an intermittent kind of tippling which goes on all day long, beginning very early and ending very late. A man, whose occupation in life is headwork, begins to think he wants a stimulant—begins by having his brandy and soda at twelve o'clock perhaps; then finds he can't get on without it after eleven; then takes it before breakfast—in lieu of breakfast; and goes on with brandy and soda at intervals till dinner time. At dinner he has no appetite, tries to create one with a bottle of dry champagne, eats very little, but dines on the champagne, feels an unaccountable depression of spirits later on in the evening, and takes more brandy, without soda this time; and so on, and so on; till, after a period of sleeplessness, he begins to have ugly dreams, then to see waking visions, hear imaginary voices, stumble upon the edge of an imaginary precipice. If he is an elderly man he gets shaky in the lower limbs, then his hands

become habitually tremulous, especially in the early morning, when he is like a figure hung on wires—and so on, and so on; and unless he pulls himself up by a great moral effort, the chances are that he will have a sharp attack of *delirium tremens*.'

'You do not fear such an attack for my husband?

'Mr. Wendover is a young man, but he has evidently abused his constitution; there is no knowing what may happen if you don't take care of him. Alcohol is a cumulative poison, and that "pegging" I have told you of is diabolical. Nature throws off an overdose of alcohol, but the daily, hourly dose eats into the system.'

'How am I to take care of him?' asked Ida, despairingly.

'You must keep wine and spirits away from him, except in extreme moderation.'

'What, speak to the butler? Tell him that my husband is a drunkard?'

'You need not go quite so far as that, but it will be necessary to cut off the supplies somehow, nd to substitute a nourishing diet for stimulants.'

'Yes, if he could eat; but he has no appetite —he eats hardly anything.'

'Unhappily, that is one of the symptoms of his disease, and the most difficult to overcome. But you must do your utmost to make him eat, and to prevent his getting brandy. A little light claret or Rhine wine may be allowed; nothing more. I will send you a sedative which you can give him at bedtime.'

'I do not think he will take anything of that kind. He has set his face against accepting your advice.'

'I believe if you were to take a decided tone he would succumb; if not, you had better ask Dr. Mallison to come down and see him. It will be a costly visit, and money thrown away, as the case is perfectly simple; but I dare say you will not mind that.'

'I should mind nothing if he could be cured. It is horrible to see such ruin of body and mind in one so young,' Ida answered sadly.

'Well, you must see what influence you can exercise over him for his own good. I will call every

other day, and hear how you are getting on with him; and if you fail, we must summon Dr. Mallison.'

Ida spoke to the butler. It was a hard thing to do, and it seemed to her a kind of treachery against her husband—as if she were inflicting everlasting disgrace upon him in secret, like a midnight assassin, who stabs his victim in the back. Her voice trembled, and her face was deadly pale as she spoke to the butler, an old servant who had been in the household from his boyhood.

'Rogers, I want you to be a little more careful in your arrangements about wine and spirits,' she began falteringly. 'Mr. Wendover is in a low state of health, suffering from a nervous complaint, in fact, and we fear that he is taking too much brandy. Will you kindly try to prevent it?'

'It will be very difficult, ma'am. Mr. Wendover gives his orders, and he expects to be obeyed.'

'But upon this one point you must not obey him. You can say that you have Lady Palliser's orders that no more brandy is to be brought up from the cellar. I shall tell her that I have told you this.'

'Yes ma'am. I was afraid too much brandy was being drunk, but it was not my place to mention it,' said Rogers, politely.

He would have said the same, perhaps, had the house been on fire.

Neither sherry nor champagne was served at dinner that day, and the claret which was offered Mr. Wendover was of a very thin quality.

'I'll take champagne,' he said to the butler.

'There is not any upstairs, sir.'

Brian turned angrily upon the man, and Ida, pale but resolute, came to the rescue.

'We do not drink champagne at dinner when we are alone, Brian,' she said; 'and I don't think it is quite fair to Vernie's cellars that Moët should be served every day because you are here.'

'Vernon's cellars! Ah, I forgot that we are all here on sufferance, and that I am drinking Vernon's wine.'

'You may have as much of my champagne as you like,' said Vernie, getting very red; 'but I don't think it does you any good, for you are always so cross afterwards.'

Brian looked at the boy with a savage gleam in his eyes, and muttered something, but made no audible reply.

'I'll go back to my chambers to-morrow,' he said; 'I can have a bottle of Moët there without being under an obligation to anybody. Give me some brandy and soda,' he said to the butler; 'I can't drink this verjuice.'

'There is no brandy, sir.'

'Oh! Sir Vernon's cognac is to be kept sacred, too. I congratulate you, Vernon, upon having two such economical guardians. Your minority will be a period of considerable saving.'

He made no further remonstrance, drank neither claret nor hock, ate hardly anything, but sat through the dinner in sullen silence, and went off to his room directly Lady Palliser had said grace, leaving the others to take their strawberries and cream alone. Vernon was what Rogers the butler called 'a mark on' strawberries and cream.

When Vernie had finished his strawberries, Ida went to her husband's study; but the door was locked, and when she asked to be admitted Brian refused.

'I'd rather be alone, thank you,' he answered, curtly. 'I have an article to write for one of the legal papers. You can amuse yourself with the baronet. I know you are always glad to be free.'

'Come for a stroll in the Park, Brian,' she pleaded, gently, pitying him with all her heart, more tenderly inclined to him in his decay and degradation than she had been in his prime of manhood, before these fatal habits began. 'Do come with us, dear. We won't walk further than you like; it's a lovely evening.'

'I hate a summer twilight,' returned Brian; 'it always gives me the horrors—a creepy time, when all sorts of loathsome creatures are abroad—bats, and owls, and stag-beetles, cockchafers, and other abominations. Can't you let me alone?' he went on, angrily. 'I tell you I have work to do.'

Ida left him upon this, without a word. What was she to do? This was her first experience of a mind diseased, and it seemed to her worse than any trouble that had ever touched her before. She had stood beside her father's death-bed, and the hair of her flesh had stood up at the awful mo-

ment of dissolution, when it was as if verily a spirit had passed before her face, calling her beloved from the known to the unknown. Yet in the awe and horror of death there had been holiness and comfort, a whisper of hope leading her thoughts to higher regions, a promise that this pitiful, inexplicable parting was not the End. This dissolution in the living man, this palpable progress of degradation, visible day by day and hour by hour, was worse than death. It meant the decay and ruin of a mind, the wreck of an immortal soul. What place could there be in heaven for the drunkard, who had dribbled away his reason, his power to discriminate between right and wrong, by perpetual doses of brandy? what could be pleaded in extenuation of this gradual and deliberate suicide?

Ida went slowly downstairs, her soul steeped in gloom, seeing no ray of light on the horizon; for with the most earnest desire to save her erring husband, she felt herself powerless to help him against himself. If he were denied the things he cared for at Wimperfield, there was little doubt that he would go back to his solitary chambers,

where he was his own master. He was not so ill either in mind or body as to justify her in using actual restraint.

At the moment she thought of telegraphing for Aunt Betsy, whose firm manly mind might offer valuable aid in such a crisis; but she shrank from the idea of exposing her husband's degradation even to his aunt. She did not want the family at Kingthorpe to know how low he had fallen. Mr. and Mrs. Jardine had been impressed by the change in him, and Bessie had harped upon his lost good looks, habitual irritability, and deteriorated manners; but neither had hinted at an inkling of the cause; and Ida hoped the hideous truth had been unsuspected by either. She decided, therefore, during those few minutes of meditation which she spent in the portico waiting for Vernon, that she would rely on her own intelligence, and upon professional aid rather than upon any family intervention. If she could, by her own strong hand, with the help of the London physician, lead her husband's footsteps out of this Tophet into which he had sunk himself, she would spare no

trouble, withhold no sacrifice to effect his rescue, and she and her step-mother, the kindliest of women, would keep the secret between them.

Vernon came bounding out of the hall, eager for the accustomed evening ramble. This evening walk with the boy had been Ida's happiest time of late, perhaps the only portion of her day in which she had enjoyed the sense of freedom from ever-present anxiety, in which she had put away troubled thought. She had gone back to her duty meekly and resignedly when this time of respite was over, but with a sense of unspeakable woe. Wimperfield with its lighted windows, stone walls, and classic portico, had seemed to her only as a prison house, a whited sepulchre, fair without and loathsome within.

Vernie was full of curiosity about that little scene at the dinner table. The boy had that quick perception of the minds and acts of others which is generally developed in a child who spends the greater part of his life with grown-up people; and he had been quite as conscious as his elders of the unpleasantness of the scene.

'I hope Brian doesn't think I'm stingy about

the wine,' he said; 'he might drink it all for anything I should care. I don't want it.'

'I know, darling; but you were quite right in what you said at dinner. The wine does Brian harm, and that's why mamma and I don't want him to take any.'

'Has it always done him harm?' asked Vernon.

'Always; that is, lately.'

'Then why did you let him take so much—a whole bottle, sometimes two bottles—all to himself at dinner. I heard Rogers tell Mrs. Mogg about it.'

'Rogers ought not to have given him so much.'

'Oh! but Rogers said it wasn't his place to make remarks, only he was very sorry for poor Mrs. Wendover—that's you, you know—not Mrs. Wendover at Kingthorpe.'

'Oh, Vernie, you were not listening?'

'Of course not. I wasn't listening on purpose; but I was in the lobby outside the housekeeper's room, waiting for some grease for my shooting boots. I always grease them myself, you know, for nobody else does it properly; and Rogers said the brandy

Mr. Wendover had drunk in three weeks would make Mrs. Mogg's hair stand on end; but it couldn't,—could it?—when she wears a front. A front couldn't stand on end,' said Vernon, exploding at his own small joke, which, like most of the witticisms of childhood, was founded on the physical deficiencies of age.

'Look, Vernie! there is going to be a lovely sunset,' said Ida, anxious to change the conversation.

But Vernon's inquiring mind was not satisfied.

'Is it wicked to drink champagne and brandy?' he asked.

'Yes, dear, it is wicked to take anything which we know will do us harm. It would be wicked to take poison; and brandy is a kind of poison.'

'Except for poor people, when they are ill; they always come to the vicarage for brandy when they are ill, and Mrs. Jardine gives them a little.'

'Brandy is a medicine sometimes, but it is a poison if anyone takes too much of it—a poison that ruins body and soul. I hope Brian will not take any more; but we mustn't talk about it, darling, above all to strangers.'

'No, I shouldn't talk of it to anybody but you, because I like Brian. He used to go fishing with me, and to be so good-natured, and to tell me funny stories, and do imitations of actors for me; but now he's so cross. Is that the brandy?'

'I'm afraid it is.'

'Then I hate brandy.'

They were in the park by this time, wandering in the wildest part of the ground, where the bracken grew breast high in great sweeps of feathery green. They came to a spot on the edge of a hill where three or four noble old elms had been felled, and where a couple of men in smock-frocks were sawing coffin-boards.

'What are those broad planks wanted for?' the boy asked; 'and why do you make them so short?'

'They're not uncommon short, Sir Vernon,' the man answered, touching his hat; 'the shortest on 'em is six foot. Them be for coffins, Sir Vernon.'

'How horrid! I hope they won't be wanted for ages,' said the boy.

'Not much chance o' that, sir; there's allus summun a wantin' a weskit o' this make,' answered

the man, with a grin, as Vernon and Ida went on, uncomfortably impressed by the idea of those two men sawing their coffin-boards in the calm, bright evening, with every articulation of the branching fern standing sharply out against the yellow light, as on the margin of a golden sea.

They rambled on, and presently Ida was repeating passages from those Shakespearian plays which had formed Vernon's first introduction to English history, and of which he had never tired. Ida knew all the great speeches, and indeed a good many of the more famous scenes, by heart, and Vernon liked to hear them over and over again, alternately detesting the Lancastrians and pitying the Yorkists, or hating York and compassionating Lancaster, as the fortunes of war wavered. And then there was Richard the Second, more tenderly touched by Shakespeare than by Hume or Hallam; and Richard the Third, whose iniquities were made respectable by a kind of diabolical thoroughness; and that feebler villain John. Vernon was as familiar with them as if they had been flesh and blood acquaintances.

'Cheap Jack knows Shakespeare as well as you do,' said Vernon presently, when they had left the park by a wooden gate that opened into a patch of common land, which lay between the Wimperfield fence and Blackman's hanger.

'Who is Cheap Jack?' asked Ida absently.

'The man you saw the night I came home, when Mr. Jardine was with us. Don't you remember?'

'The man in the cart—the showman? Yes, I know; but I did not see him.'

'No; he hates the gentry, and women, too, I think. But he likes Shakespeare.'

'I shouldn't have thought he would have known anything about Shakespeare.'

'Oh, but he does—better than you even. When he was mending my fishing-rod—you remember, don't you?—I told you how clever he was at fishing-rods.'

'Yes, I remember—it was the day you were out so long quite alone; and I was dreadfully frightened about you.'

'Oh, but that was silly. Besides, I wasn't alone—I was with Jack all day. And if I had

been alone, I can take care of myself—I shall be twelve next birthday. Nobody would try to steal me now,' said Vernon, drawing himself up and swaggering a little.

'What, not even good Mrs. Brown? Well, no; I think you are too clever to be stolen. Still you must not go out again without Robert.' (Robert was a youth of two-and-twenty, Sir Vernon's body-guard and particular attendant, to whom the little baronet occasionally gave the go-by.) 'Besides, I don't think you ought to associate with such a person as this Cheap Jack—a vagabond stroller, whose past life nobody knows.'

'Oh, but you don't know what kind of man Jack is—he's the cleverest man I ever knew—cleverer than Mr. Jardine; he knows everything. Let's go up on the hanger.'

'No, dear, it's getting late; we must go home.'

'No, we needn't go home till we like—nobody wants us. Mamma will be asleep over her knitting. —how she does sleep! and she'll wake up surprised when we go home, and say, "Gracious, is it ten o'clock? These summer evenings are *so* short!"'

'But you ought to be in bed, Vernie.'

'No, I oughtn't. The thrushes haven't gone to bed yet. Hark at that one singing his evening hymn! Do come just a wee bit further.'

They were at the foot of the hanger by this time, and now began to climb the slope. The atmosphere was balmy with the breath of the pines, and there was an almost tropical warmth in the wood—languorous, inviting to repose. The crescent moon hung pale above the tops of the trees, pale above that rosy flush of evening which filled the western sky.

'What makes you think Jack so clever?' inquired Ida, more for the sake of sustaining the conversation than from any personal interest in the subject.

'Oh, because he knows everything. He told me all about Macbeth, the witches, don't you know, and the ghost, and Mrs.—no, Lady Macbeth—walking in her sleep, and then he made my flesh creep—worse than you do, when you talk about ghosts. And then he told me about Agamemnon, the same that's in Homer. I haven't begun Greek yet, but Mr. Jardine told me about him and Cly—

Cly—what's her name?—his wife. And then he told me about Africa and the black men, and about India, and tiger-hunts, and snakes, and the great mountains where there are tribes of wild monkeys; —I should so like to have a monkey, Ida! Can I have a monkey? And he told me about South America, just as if he had been there and seen it all.'

'He must be a genius,' said Ida, smiling.

'Can I have a monkey?'

'If your mother doesn't object, and if we can get a nice one that won't bite you.'

'Oh, he wouldn't bite me; I should be friends with him directly. When I am grown up I shall shoot tigers.'

'I shall not like Mr. Cheap Jack if he puts such ideas into your head.'

'Oh, but you must like him, Ida, for I mean to have him always for my friend; and when I come of age I shall go to the Rockies with him, and shoot moose and things.'

'Oh, you unkind boy! is that all the happiness I am to have when you are grown up.'

'You can come too.'

'What, go about America with a Cheap Jack! What a dreadful fate for me!'

'He is not dreadful—he is a splendid fellow.'

'But if he hates women he would make himself disagreeable.'

'Not to you. He would like you. I talked to him about you once, and he listened, and seemed so pleased, and made me tell him a lot more,'

'Impertinent curiosity!' said Ida, with a vexed air. 'You are a very silly boy to talk about your relations to a man of that class.'

'He is not a man of that class,' retorted Vernon angrily; 'besides I didn't talk about my relations, as you call it. I only talked about you. When I told him about mamma he didn't seem to listen. I could see that by his eyes, you know; but he made me go on talking about you, and asked me all kinds of questions.'

'He is a very impertinent person.'

'Hush, there he is, smoking outside his cottage,' cried the boy, pointing to a figure sitting on a rude bench in front of that hovel which had once sheltered Lord Pontifex's underkeeper.

Ida saw a tall, broad-shouldered figure with a tawny face and a long brown beard. The face was half hidden under a slouched felt hat, the figure was clad in clumsy corduroy. Ida was just near enough to see that the outline of the face was good, when the man rose and went into his hut, shutting the door behind him.

'Discourteous, to say the least of it,' she exclaimed, laughing at Vernon's disconcerted look.

'I'll make him open his door,' said the boy, running towards the cottage; but Ida ran after him and stopped him midway.

'Don't, my pet,' she said; 'every man's house is his castle, even Cheap Jack's. Besides I have really no wish to make your friend's acquaintance. Oh, Vernie,' looking at her watch, 'it's a quarter-past nine! We must go home as fast as ever we can.'

'He is a nasty disagreeable thing,' said Vernon. 'I did so want you to see the inside of his cottage. He has no end of books, and the handsomest fox terrier you ever saw—and such a lot of pipes, and black bear skins to put over his bed at night—such a jolly comfortable little den! I shall have one just like it in the park when I come of age.'

'You talk of doing so many things when you come of age.'

'Yes; and I mean to do them, every one; unless you and mother let me do them sooner. It's a dreadful long time to wait till I'm twenty-one!'

'I don't think we are tyrants, or that we shall refuse you anything reasonable.'

'Not a cottage in the park?'

'No, not even a cottage in the park.'

They walked back at a brisk pace, by common and park, not loitering to look at anything, though the glades and hills and hollows were lovely in that dim half-light which is the darkness of summer. The new moon hung like a silver lamp in mid-heaven, and all the multitude of stars were shining around and above her, while far away in unfathomable space, shone the mysterious light which started on its earthward journey in the years that are gone for ever.

Lady Palliser was not calmly slumbering in front of the tea-table, in the mellow light of a duplex lamp, after her wont. She was standing at the open window, watching for Ida's return.

'Oh, my dear, I have been so frightened,' she exclaimed, as Ida and Vernon appeared.

'About what, dear mamma?'

'About Brian. He has been going on so. Rogers came to tell me, and I went up to the corridor, and asked him to unlock his door and let me in, but he wouldn't. Perhaps it was providential that he didn't unlock the door, for he might have killed me.'

'Oh, mamma, what nonsense!' exclaimed Ida. She hurried Vernon off to bed before his mother could say another word, and then went back to the widow, who was walking about the drawing-room in much perturbation.

'Now tell me everything,' said Ida; 'I did not want Vernon to be frightened.'

'No, indeed, poor pet. But oh! Ida, if he should try to kill Vernon!'

'Dear mother, he has no idea of killing anyone. What can have put such dreadful notions in your head?'

'The way he went on, Ida. I stopped outside his door ever so long listening to him. He walked up and down like a madman, throwing things

about, talking and muttering to himself all the time. I think he was packing his portmanteau.'

'There is nothing so dreadful in that—nothing to alarm you.'

'Oh! Ida, when a person is once out of their mind, there is no knowing what they may do.'

Ida did all in her power to soothe and reassure the frightened little woman, and, having done this, she went straight to her husband's room.

She knocked two or three times without receiving any answer; then came a sullen refusal: 'I don't want to be worried by anyone. You can go to your own room, and leave me alone.'

But, upon her assuming a tone of authority, he opened the door, grumbling all the while.

The room was in frightful confusion—a couple of portmanteaux lay open on the floor; books, papers, clothes, were scattered in every direction. There was nothing packed. Brian was in shirt-sleeves and slippers, and had been smoking furiously, for the room was full of tobacco.

'Why don't you open your windows, Brian?' said his wife; 'the atmosphere is horrible.'

She went over to one of the windows, and flung open the sash.

'That's a comfortable thing to do,' he said, coming over to her, 'to open my window on a snowy night.'

'Snowy, Brian! Why, it's summer—a lovely night!'

'Summer! nonsense. Don't you see the snow? Why, its falling thickly. Look at the flakes—like feathers. Look, look!'

He pointed out of the window into the clear moonlit air, and tried to catch imaginary snow-flakes with his long, nervous fingers.

'Brian, you *must* know that it is summer-time,' Ida said, firmly. 'Look at the woods—those deep masses of shadow from the oaks and beeches—in all the beauty of their summer foliage.'

'Yes; it's odd, isn't it?—midsummer, and a snow-storm!'

'What have you been doing with all those things?'

'Packing. I must go to London early to-morrow. I have an appointment with the architect.'

'What architect?'

'The man who is to plan the alterations for this house. I shall make great alterations, you know, now that the place is yours. I am going to build an underground riding school, like that at Welbeck.'

'The place mine? What are you dreaming of?'

'Of course it is yours, now Vernon is dead. You were to inherit everything at his death. You cannot have forgotten that.'

'Vernon dead! Why, Brian, he is snug and safe in his room a little way off. I have seen him within this half-hour.'

'You are a fool,' he said; 'he died nearly three months ago. You are the sole owner of this place, and I am going to make it the finest mansion in the county.'

He rambled on, talking rapidly, wildly, of all the improvements and alterations he intended making, with an assumption of a business-like air amidst all this lunacy, which made his distracted state so much the more painful to contemplate. He talked of builders, specifications, estimates, and quantities—was full of self-importance—described picture gal-

leries, music rooms, high-art decorations which would have cost a hundred thousand pounds, and all with absolute belief in his own power to realise these splendid visions. Yet every now and then in the very rush of his projects there came a sudden cloud of fear—his jaw fell—he looked apprehensively behind him—became darkly brooding —muttered something about that hideous charge hanging over him—a conspiracy hatched by men who should have been his friends—the probability of a great trial in Westminster Hall; and then he ran on again about builders and architects—Whistler, Burne Jones — and the marvellous mansion he was going to erect on the site of this present Wimperfield.

He rambled on with this horrible garrulity for a time that seemed almost an eternity to his agonised wife, and only ceased at last from positive exhaustion. But when Ida talked to him with gentle firmness, reminding him that Vernon was still the owner of Wimperfield, and that she was never likely to be its mistress, he changed his tone, and appeared to be in some measure recalled to his right senses.

'What, have I been talking rot again?' he muttered, with a sheepish look. 'Yes, of course, the boy is still owner of the place. The alterations must stand over. Get me some brandy and soda, Ida, my mouth is parched.'

Ida rose as if to obey him, and rang the bell; but when the servant came she ordered soda-water only.

'Brandy and soda,' Brian said; 'do you hear? Bring a bottle of brandy. I can't get through the night without a little now and then.'

Ida gave the man a look which he understood. He left the room in silence.

'Brian,' she said, when he was gone, 'you must not have any more brandy. It is brandy which has done you harm, which has filled your brain with these horrible delusions. Mr. Fosbroke told me so. You affect to despise him; but he is a sensible man who has had large experience.'

'Large experience! in an agricultural village—physicking a handful of rustics!' cried Brian, scornfully.

'I know that he is clever, and I believe him,' answered Ida; 'my own common sense tells me that

he is right. I see you the wreck and ruin of what you have been; and I know there is only one reason for this dreadful change.'

'It is your fault,' he said sullenly. 'I should be a different man if you had cared for me. I had nothing worth living for.'

Ida soothed him, and argued with him, with inexhaustible patience, full of pity for his fallen state. She was firm in her refusal to order brandy for him, in spite of his angry protest that he was being treated like a child, in spite of his assertion that the London physician had ordered him to take brandy. She stayed with him for hours, during which he alternated between rambling garrulity and sullen despondency; till at last, worn out with the endeavour to control or to soothe him, she withdrew to her own room, adjoining his, and left him, in the hope that, if left to himself, he would go to bed and sleep.

Rest of any kind for herself was impossible, weighed down with anxiety about her husband's condition, and stricken with remorse at the thought that it was perhaps his ill-starred marriage

which had in some wise tended to bring about this ruin of a life. And yet things had gone well with him, existence had been made very easy for him, since his marriage; and only moral perversity would have so blighted a career which had lain open to all the possibilities of good fortune. The initial difficulty—poverty, which so many men have to overcome, had been conquered for Brian within the first year of his marriage. And now six years were gone, and he had done nothing except waste and ruin his mind and body.

Ida left the door ajar between the two rooms, and lay down in her clothes, ready to go to her husband's assistance if he should need help of any kind. She had taken the key out of the door opening from his room into the corridor, so that he would have to pass through her own room in going out. She had done this from a vague fear that he might go roaming about the house in the dead of the night, scaring her stepmother or the boy by some mad violence. She made up her mind to telegraph for the London physician early next morning, and to obtain some skilled

attendant to watch and protect her husband. She had heard of a man in such a condition throwing himself out of a window, or cutting his throat: and she felt that every moment was a moment of fear, until proper means had been taken to protect Brian from his own madness.

She listened while he paced the adjoining room, muttering to himself; once she looked in, and saw him sitting on the floor, hunting for some imaginary objects which he saw scattered around him.

'How did I come to drop such a lot of silver?' he muttered; 'what a devil of a nuisance not to be able to pick it up properly.'

She watched him groping about the carpet, pursuing imaginary objects, with eager sensitive fingers, and muttering to himself angrily when they evaded him.

By-and-by he flung himself upon his bed, but not to sleep, only to turn restlessly from side to side, over and over again, with a weary monotony which was even more wearisome to the watcher than to himself.

Two or three times he got up and hunted

behind the bed curtains, evidently with the idea of some lurking foe, and then lay down again, apparently but half convinced that he was alone.

Once he started up suddenly, just as he was dropping off to sleep, and complained of a flash of light which had almost blinded him.

'Lightning,' he muttered; 'I believe I am struck blind. Come here, Ida.'

She went to him and soothed him, and told him there had been no lightning; it was only his fancy.

'Everything is my fancy,' he said, 'the world is built out of fancies, the universe is only an extension of the individual mind;' and then he began to ramble on upon every metaphysical theory he had ever read about, from Plato and Aristotle to Leibnitz and Kant, from Hegel to Bain—talking, talking, talking, through the slow hours of that terrible night.

At last, when the sun was high, he fell into what seemed a sound sleep; and then Ida, utterly worn with care and watching, changed her gown for a cashmere *peignoir*, and lay down on her bed.

She slept soundly for a blessed hour or more of

respite and forgetfulness, then woke suddenly with an acute consciousness of trouble, yet vaguely remembering the nature of that trouble. Memory came back only too soon. She rose hurriedly, and went to look at her patient.

His room was empty. He had passed through her room and gone out into the corridor, without awakening her. She rang her bell, and was answered by Lady Palliser's own maid, Jane Dyson, who came in a leisurely way with the morning cups of tea. It was now seven o'clock.

'Is Mr. Wendover downstairs—in the dining-room or library?' Ida asked, trying not to look too anxious.

'I have not seen him, ma'am.'

'Inquire, please. I want to know where he is, and why he left his room so much earlier than usual.'

She had a dismal feeling that all the household must know what was amiss, that the shame and degradation of the case could hardly be deepened.

'Yes, ma'am; I'll go and see.'

'Do, please, while I take my bath,' said Ida. 'You can come back to me in ten minutes.'

The cold bath refreshed her, and she was dressing hurriedly when Jane Dyson returned to announce that Mr. Wendover and Sir Vernon had gone out fishing at half-past six—the under-housemaid had seen them go, and had heard Mr. Wendover say that they would have a long day.

'Go and ask her if she heard where they were going,' said Ida, going on with her dressing, eager to be out of doors on her brother's track.

That wild talk of Brian's last night—that horrible delusion about the boy's death—coupled with this early expedition, filled her with unspeakable fear. It was no new thing for Brian and the boy to go out fishing together. They had spent many a long day whipping distant trout streams in the summer that was gone, but this year Vernon had vainly endeavoured to tempt his old companion to join him in his wanderings with rod and line. Brian had refused all such invitations peevishly or sullenly; as if it were an offence to remind him how poor a creature he had become. And now, after a night of wakefulness

and delirium, Brian, with his brain still wild and disordered, perhaps, had taken the boy out with him on some indefinite excursion—alone—the helpless child in the power of a maniac!

Ida did not wait for the return of the maid, but ran downstairs as soon as she was dressed, and questioned Rogers the butler. Rogers, as an old and valuable servant, took his ease of a morning, and only appeared upon the scene when underlings had made all things comfortable and ready to his hand. He therefore knew nothing of the mode and manner of Mr. Wendover and the boy's departure.

Robert, Sir Vernon's body-guard, groom, and general out-door retainer, was fetched from his breakfast; and he was able to inform Mrs. Wendover how Sir Vernon had gone out to the stables at twenty minutes past six, with his fishing basket slung over his shoulder, to ask for some artificial flies which Robert had been making for him, and to say that he should not want the pony or Robert all the morning, as he was going out with Mr. Wendover. He had not mentioned his destination, but Robert knew that the water meadows on the other side of Blackman's

Hanger were his favourite ground for such sport. He had been there with Robert many a day.

His remotest point in this direction was five or six miles from home. The boy was able to walk twelve miles in a day without undue fatigue, resting a good deal, and taking his own time; but in a general way he rode his pony when he went on any long excursion, and dismounted from time to time as the fancy took him.

'I'm afraid he may overtire himself with Mr. Wendover, said Ida, anxious to give a good reason for her anxiety. 'Get Cleopatra ready for me, and get a horse for yourself, and we'll ride after them. Mr. Wendover is an invalid, and ought not to have the trouble of a child upon his hands all day. If I can overtake them, I shall persuade them both to come back.'

'If they don't, they'll be likely to get caught,' said Robert, exploring the clouds with the sagacious eyes of a rustic observer, schooled by long experience to read signs and tokens in the heavens. 'There'll be a storm, I'm afeard, before dinner-time.'

Dinner-time with Robert meant the hour of the

sun's meridian, which he took to be the universal and legitimate dinner-hour for all mankind, designed so to be from the creation.

'How soon can you have the horses ready?'

'In a quarter of an hour, ma'am.'

Ida flew upstairs, meeting her step-mother on the way. Lady Palliser had gone to her son's room as soon as she left her own—her custom always; and on missing the boy, had made instant inquiries as to his whereabouts, and had already taken fright.

'Oh, Ida, if that dreadful husband of yours should lure him into some lonely place, and kill him! My boy, my beloved, my lovely boy!'

'Dear mother, be reasonable. Brian would not hurt a hair of his head. Brian loves him,' urged Ida soothingly, yet with a torturing pain at her heart, remembering Brian's delirious raving last night.

'What will not a madman do? Who can tell what he will do?' cried Lady Palliser, wringing her hands.

'Trust in God, mother; no harm will come to our boy. No harm shall come to him—except

perhaps a wetting. Get warm clothes ready for him against I bring him home. I am going to ride after him,' said Ida, hurrying off to her room.

In less than ten minutes she had put on her habit, and was in the stable yard; and three minutes afterwards Fanny Palliser, roaming up and down and round about her son's room like a perturbed spirit, heard the clatter of hoofs, and saw her step-daughter ride out of the yard attended by Robert, the best and kindest of grooms, and devoted to his young master.

Lady Palliser went downstairs, and again interrogated the housemaid who had witnessed Sir Vernon's departure. 'How had Mr. Wendover seemed?' she asked—'good-tempered, and pleasant, and quiet?'

Very good-tempered, and very pleasant, the girl told her, but not quiet; he talked and laughed a great deal, and seemed full of fun, but in a great hurry.

The mother remembered how many a time her boy and Brian Wendover had been out together, and tried to put away fear. After all, Brian was a nice

fellow—he had always made himself agreeable to her. It was only of late that he had become fitful and strange in his ways. She had seen such a case before in her own family, her own flesh and blood, her mother's only brother. That victim to his own vice had been elderly at the time she knew him—a chronic sufferer. She but too well remembered his tottering knees, and restless, tremulous feet : those painful morning hours when he shook like an aspen leaf : those dreadful nights, when he sat cowering over the fire, glancing askant over his shoulder every now and then, haunted by phantoms, hearing and replying to imaginary voices, striving with restless, shivering hands to rid himself of imaginary vermin. He had been mad enough at times in all conscience, as mad as any lunatic in Bedlam ; but he had never tried to injure any one but himself. Once they found him with an open razor, possibly contemplating suicide ; but he abandoned the idea meekly enough when surprised by his friends, and explained himself with one of those lies with which his tremulous tongue was ever so ready.

Arguing with herself by the light of past

experience, that after all this drink-madness was a disease apart, seldom culminating in actual violence, Lady Palliser sat down before her silver urn, and made believe to breakfast, in solitary state, thinking as she poured out her tea how very little all these grand things upon the table could help or comfort one in the hour of trouble. Nay, in such times of misfortune, the little sitting-room of her childhood, the round table, and shabby old chairs, the kettle on the hob, and the cat upon the hearth, had seemed to possess an element of sympathy and comfort entirely wanting in this spacious formal dining-room, with its perpetual repetition of straight lines, and its chilling distances.

Ida rode through the park, and across the common, and round the base of Blackman's Hanger, as fast as her clever mare could carry her with any degree of comfort to either. The clever mare was somewhat skittish from want of work, and inclined to show her cleverness by shying at every stray rabbit, or crocodile-shaped excrescence in the way of fallen timber, lying within her range of vision; but Ida was too anxious to be disconcerted

by any such small surprises, and rode on without drawing rein to the banks of the trout-stream which wound its silvery way through the valley on the other side of Blackman's Hanger. If they could have crossed the hill, the distance would have been lessened by at least two-thirds, but the steep was much too sheer for any horse to mount, and Ida had to circumnavigate the wooded promontory, which narrowed and dwindled to a furzy ridge at the edge of the river. Once in the valley her way was easy, with only here and there a low hedge for the mare to jump, just enough to put her in good spirits. But after riding for about seven miles along the bank of the stream, Ida pulled up in despair, to ask Robert where next she must look for his master. It was evident this was the wrong scent.

'They'd hardly have come further nor this within the time,' Robert admitted, with a rueful look at the lather on Cleopatra's dark brown neck and shoulder; 'and this is further nor ever I come with Sir Vernon. We must try somewheres else, ma'am.'

And so they turned, and at Robert's direction

Ida rode off, this time at a walking pace, for another of Vernon's happy hunting grounds.

A sudden ray of hope occurred to her as they returned by the base of Blackman's Hanger. What if Vernon should have taken Brian to Cheap Jack's cottage, to introduce him to that gifted misanthrope, who, among his other accomplishments, had a talent for repairing fishing tackle?

Moved by this hope, Ida dismounted, and gave Cleopatra's bridle to Robert, who was on his feet almost as soon as his mistress.

'Let the mare rest for a little while, Robert,' she said; 'I am going up to the top of the hill to see the pedlar—Sir Vernon may have been with him this morning.'

'Not unlikely, ma'am—he be a rare favourite with Sir Vernon.'

'I hope he's a respectable person.'

'Oh, I think the chap's honest enough,' answered the groom, with a patronising air; 'but he's a queer customer—a reg'lar Peter the wild boy, he is.'

Ida, who had never heard of this gentleman, was not particularly enlightened by the comparison. She

went lightly and quickly up the steep ascent, and along a furzy ridge which rose imperceptibly skywards, until she came to the fir plantation which sheltered the gamekeeper's cottage. The lattice stood wide open, and a man was leaning with folded arms on the sill as she came in sight, but in a flash the man had gone, and the lattice was closed.

She ran on, nothing deterred by this discourtesy, and knocked at the door with the handle of her whip.

'Is my brother, Sir Vernon Palliser, here?' she asked.

'No,' a gruff voice answered from within.

'Please open the door, I want to ask your advice. The boy has wandered off on a fishing expedition. Have you seen anything of him this morning?'

'No.'

'Are you sure?'

'Do you think I should tell you a lie?' growled the sulky voice from within.

'What a surly brute!' thought Ida. 'How can Vernon like to make a companion of such a man?'

She lingered, only half convinced, and nervously

repeated her story—how Sir Vernon had gone out with Mr. Wendover that morning before seven, and how she had been looking for them, and was afraid they would be caught in the storm which was evidently coming.

'You'd better go home before you're half-drowned yourself,' growled the surly voice. 'I'll look for the boy and send him home to you, if he's above ground.'

'Will you? will you really look for him?' faltered Ida, in a rapture of gratitude. 'You know his ways, and he is so fond of you. Pray find him, and bring him home. You shall be liberally rewarded. We shall be deeply grateful,' she added hastily, fearing she had offended by this suggestion of sordid recompense.

'I'll do my best,' grumbled the woman-hater, 'when you've cleared off. I shan't stir till you're gone.'

'I am going this instant, my horse is at the bottom of the Hanger. God bless you for your goodness to my brother.'

'God bless you,' replied the voice in a deeper and less strident tone.

Big drops were falling slowly and far apart from the lowering sky as Ida went down the hill, a steep and even dangerous descent for feet less accustomed to that kind of ground.

'You'd better ride home as fast as you can, ma'am,' said Robert, as he mounted Cleopatra's light burden. 'The mare's had a good blow, and you can canter her all the way back.'

'I don't care about the storm for myself. Sir Vernon must be out in it.'

A low muttering peal of thunder rolled slowly along the valley as she settled herself in her saddle.

'Sir Vernon won't hurt, ma'am. Besides, who knows if he ain't at home by this time?'

There was comfort in this suggestion; but after a smart ride home, under a drenching shower diversified by thunder and lightning, and found Lady Palliser waiting for her in the portico. There had been no tidings of the boy. Two of the gardeners had been despatched in quest of him—each provided with a mackintosh and an umbrella; and now the mother, no longer apprehensive of homicidal mania on the part of Brian, was tortured

by her fear of the fury of the elements, the pitiless rain which might give her boy rheumatic fever, lightnings which might strike him with blindness or death, rivers which might heave themselves above their banks to drown him, trees which might wrench themselves up from their roots on purpose to tumble on him. Lady Palliser always took the catastrophic view of nature when she thought of her boy.

Luncheon was out of the question for either Ida or her stepmother. They went into the dining-room when the gong sounded, and each was affectionately anxious that the other should take some refreshment; but they could do nothing except watch the storm, the fine old trees bending to the tempest, the darkly lurid sky brooding over the earth, thick sheets of rain driven across the foreground, and almost shutting out the distant woods and hills. The two women stood silently watching that unfriendly sky, and listened for every footstep in the hall, in the fond hope of the boy's return. And then they tried to comfort each other with the idea that he was under cover somewhere, at some village inn, eating a homely meal of bread and

cheese, happy and cheery as a bird, perhaps, while they were so miserable about him.

'I have an idea that Cheap Jack will find them,' said Ida by-and-by. 'Vernon says he is such a clever fellow; and a rover like that would know every inch of the country.'

The day wore on; the storm rolled away towards other hills and woods; and a rent in the dun-coloured clouds showed the bright blue above them. Soon all the heaven was clear, and the wet grass was shining in the afternoon sunlight.

One of the messengers now returned with the useless mackintosh. He had been able to hear nothing of Sir Vernon and his companion. He had been at Wimperfield village, and through two other villages, and had taken a circuitous way back by another meadow-stream, where there might be a hope of trout; but he had seen no trace of the missing boy. The field labourers he had met had been able to give him no information.

There was nothing to be done but to wait, and wait, and wait. Robert had mounted a fresh horse and had gone off to scour the country, wondering

not a little that there should be such a fuss about a day's fishing.

Five o'clock came, and afternoon tea, usually the pleasantest hour of the day; for in this summer-time the five o'clock tea-table was prepared in the rose-garden in front of the drawing-room, under a Japanese umbrella, and in the shade of a screen of magnolia and Portugal laurel, mock orange and guelder rose, that had been growing for half a century. To-day Lady Palliser and her step-daughter took their tea in silent dejection. They had grown weary of comforting each other—weary of all hopeful speculations.

It was on the stroke of six—the boy and his companion had been away nearly twelve hours. They could do nothing but wait.

Suddenly they heard voices—two or three voices talking excitedly and all together—and then a shrill sweet cry in a voice they both knew so well.

'He is alive!' cried Fanny Palliser, starting up and rushing towards the house.

She had scarcely gone half-a-dozen steps when Rogers came out, crimson, puffing with excitement, leading Vernon by the arm.

'Here he is, my lady, safe and sound,' said Rogers; 'but he has had a rare drenching—the sooner we put him to bed the better.'

'Yes, yes, he must go to bed this instant. Oh, thank God, my darling, my darling. Oh, you naughty boy, how could you give me such a fright? You have almost broken your poor mother's heart, and Ida's too.'

'Dear mother, dear Ida, I am so sorry. But I didn't go alone. I went with Brian. That wasn't naughty, was it?' the boy asked innocently.

'Naughty to stay away so long, to go so far. Where have you been?'

'Birds' nesting in the woods, and I have got a honey-buzzard's nest—two lovely eggs, worth ten shillings apiece—the nest is built on the top of a crow's nest, don't you know. First we went fishing, but there were no fish; and then I asked Brian to let me do some bird's nesting, and we went into the woods—oh, a long, long way, and I got very tired—and we had no lunch. Brian had something in a bottle, he bought it at an inn on the road. I think it was brandy. He swore because it was

so bad, but he didn't give me any; and when the storm came on we were on Headborough Hanger, and Brian and I lost each other, and I suppose he came straight home.'

'No, Brian has not come home.'

'Oh, dear,' said the boy; 'I hope he's not looking for me all this time.'

'Come, darling, you must go to bed; we must get off these wet clothes,' said Ida, and Vernon's mother and sister carried him off to his room, where a fire was lighted, and blankets heated, and hot water bottles brought for the comfort of the young wanderer.

The boy prattled on unweariedly all the time he was being undressed, telling his day's adventures, —how Brian had been frightened because he thought there were some men following them, who wanted to take Brian to prison. He did not see the men, but Brian saw them hiding behind trees, and watching and following them secretly.

'I was very tired,' said the boy with a piteous look, 'and my feet ached, for Brian would go so fast. And I wanted to come home badly; but

Brian said the men were after us, and we must double upon them; and we went round and round and round till we lost ourselves; and then Brian told me to rest on the trunk of a tree while he went a little way further to see if the men were really gone: and I sat and waited till I got very cold, but he did not come back; and then I went to look for him, and couldn't find him; and then I began to cry. I was not frightened, mother, but I was so tired.'

'My poor darling! how could Brian be so cruel?' sobbed the mother, hugging her boy, while Ida was preparing warm negus and chicken sandwiches for his refreshment.

'He wasn't cruel,' explained Vernon; 'he was frightened about those men, ever so much more afraid than I was. But I never saw any men, Ida. How was it Brian could see them, when I couldn't?'

'How did you find your way home at last, dearest?' asked Ida.

'I didn't find it. I should be in the wood still if it wasn't for Jack—Jack found me, and carried me across the Hanger on his back, and took me

up to his cottage, and took off my clothes and dried them, and gave me some brandy in a tea-spoon, and then wrapped me in a bear-skin, and carried me all the way here.'

'How good of him!' said Ida; 'and how I should like to thank him for his kindness!'

'He doesn't want to be thanked. He hates girls,' said Vernon, with perfect frankness. 'He just gave me into Rogers' arms and walked off. But I shall go and thank him to-morrow morning, and I shall take him my onyx breast-pin,—the one you gave me last Christmas, mother. You don't mind, do you.'

'No, dear; you may give him anything you like. But I think he would rather have a sovereign —or a nice warm overcoat for the winter. What would be the good of an onyx pin to him?'

'What would be the good of it? Why, he would keep it for my sake, of course!' answered Vernie with a grand air.

Vernon had no appetite for the chicken sandwiches, or inclination for Madeira negus. He took a few sips of the latter to please his woman-

kind, but he could eat nothing. He had fasted all day, and now, in his over-excited state, he had no power to eat. Lady Palliser took fright at this, and sent off for the family doctor, that fatherly counsellor in whose wisdom she had such confidence. The boy was evidently feverish, his eyes were too bright, his cheeks flushed. He was restless, and unable to sleep off his fatigue in that placid slumber of childhood which brings healing with its rythmical ebb and flow.

The dinner-gong sounded, and Brian was still missing, but at half-past eight he came in, and walked straight to the drawing-room, where Ida was sitting alone. Neither she nor her step-mother had sat down to dinner. Lady Palliser was in her boy's room, waiting for the doctor.

'Oh, Brian, thank God you are safe!' said his wife, as he came slowly into the room, and sank into a chair. 'What a scare you have given us all!'

'Did you think I was drowned, or that I had cut my throat?' he asked sneeringly. 'I don't think either event would have mattered much to anyone in this house.'

His manner was entirely different from what it had been last night. His words were cool and deliberate, his expression moody, but in no wise irrational.

'You have no right to say that; but people who say such things seldom mean what they say,' replied Ida quietly. 'Had you not better go to your room at once, and change your clothes, or take a warm bath. It is a kind of suicide to wander about all day in wet clothes as you have done.'

'Who told you I was wandering about all day?'

'Vernon told us.'

'Vernon!' He started, as if suddenly remembering the boy's existence; and then in an agitated manner asked, 'Did he come home? Is he all right?'

'He came home, thank God; at least, he was brought home. I doubt if he could have found his way back alone. I am afraid he is going to be ill.'

'Nonsense, a little cold, perhaps; nothing more. It was a diabolical day. I never saw such rain—a regular tropical downpour. But what is a shower of rain for a healthy boy?'

'Not much, perhaps, if he is able to change his

clothes directly afterwards. But to be wandering about for hours in wet clothes, without food,—that is enough to kill a stronger boy than my brother.'

'It won't kill him, you may depend,' said Brian, with a cynical laugh; 'I should profit too much by his death: and I'm not one of fortune's favourites. He's tough enough.'

'Brian, you have no more heart than a stone.'

'Perhaps not. All the heart I had I gave to you, and you made a football of it; but "Why should a heart have been there, in the way of a fair woman's foot?" as the poet asks.'

'Had you not better go to your room and take off your wet clothes?' repeated Ida.

She had no inclination to argue or remonstrate with a man whose mind was so evidently askew, who had long ago passed the boundary line of principle and noble thought, and had become a mere creature of impulse, blown this way or that way by every gust of passion,—so weak a sinner that her scornful anger was tempered by pity.

'If you are anxious I should escape a severe cold, perhaps you will be liberal enough to allow me a little brandy,' said Brian.

Ida was doubtful how to reply. She had been told to withhold all stimulants, and yet this was an exceptional case. Happily at this very moment the door was opened, and Mr. Fosbroke, the family doctor, was announced.

She ran to meet him. 'Vernon has had a severe wetting, and we are afraid he is going to be ill,' she said. 'I'll take you upstairs at once. Mamma is with him.'

As soon as they were outside in the hall, she told him about Brian's request, and asked his advice.

'I think I would give him a small tumbler of grog after his wetting. To refuse would seem too severe. But take care he hasn't the control of the bottle.'

She ran back to her husband, told him she would take some brandy and water to his room for him, by the time he had changed his clothes, and then she went with Mr. Fosbroke to Sir Vernon's room, that bright airy room overlooking the rose garden, which maternal and sisterly love had decorated with all possible prettinesses, and furnished with every appliance of comfort.

Mr. Fosbroke examined the boy carefully, and seemed hardly to like the aspect of the case, though he maintained the customary professional cheeriness.

The boy was feverish, very feverish, he admitted; —pulse a good deal too rapid; temperature high. One could never tell how these cases were going to turn. The boy had suffered unusual fatigue and deprivation, and for a child so reared the strain was severe; but in all probability a gentle febrifuge, which would throw him into a perspiration, and a good night's rest, would be all that was needed, and he would be as well as ever to-morrow morning.

'These small things got out of order so easily,' said Mr. Fosbroke, smiling down at the flushed cheek on the pillow. 'They are like those foolish little Geneva watches ladies are so fond of wearing. My old turnip never goes wrong. You must make haste and grow big, Vernon; and then mamma will not be so easily frightened about you.'

Vernon smiled faintly, without opening his eyes.

'You see, you have contrived between you to make him an exotic,' said the doctor; 'and you

mustn't be surprised if he gives you a little trouble now and then. Orchids are beautiful flowers, but they are difficult to rear.'

'Oh, Mr. Fosbroke,' said Lady Palliser, 'how can you say so! Vernie is so hardy—riding his pony in all weathers.'

'Yes, but always provided with a mackintosh—always told to hurry home at the first drop of rain. Well, I dare say he will be ready for his pony to-morrow, if he takes my draught.'

To-morrow came, but Vernon was not in a condition to ride his pony. The fever and prostration were worse than they had been over night, and while Brian seemed to have taken no harm from his exposure to the storm, the boy had evidently suffered a shock to the system, from which he would be slow to recover.

Tortured with anxiety about this idolised brother, Ida did not forget her duty to her husband. She did what she had resolved to do during the long watches of that agonising night, in which she had seen Brian the victim of his own weak self-

indulgence, to all intents and purposes a madman, yet unworthy of the compassion which lunacy inspires, since his madness was self-induced,—she telegraphed to the London physician whose advice her husband affected to value; and at five o'clock in the afternoon she had the satisfaction of seeing a soberly-clad gray-haired gentleman alight from a Petersfield fly, in front of the portico. This was Dr. Mallison, of Harley Street, a great authority in all nervous disorders—as thorough and as real a man as Dr. Rylance was artificial and shallow, yet a man whom some of Dr. Rylance's most profitable patients denounced as a brute.

Dr. Mallison's plain and straightforward manner invited confidence, and Ida confided her fears and anxieties to him without scruple, telling him faithfully all that she had observed in her husband's conduct before and after that one dreadful night, which she described shudderingly.

'Yes, I remember his case. This seems to have been rather a sharp attack. He had one early in the spring, just before he came to me.'

'An attack—like this one—an attack of ——'

'Delirium tremens. Not quite so bad as this last, from his own account; but then one can never quite trust a patient's account. And you say he is better now?'

'Yes; he has been in his room all to-day, writing or reading. He seems dull and low-spirited, that is all.'

'No delusions to-day?'

'Not that I have discovered; but I have only seen him now and then. My little brother is ill, and I have been in his room most of my time.'

'Poor soul! that is a bad job,' said Dr. Mallison kindly. 'Well, you must have an attendant for your husband. Can you get anybody here, do you think? or shall I send you a man from town?'

'I shall be very grateful if you will send some one. It would be difficult to get any one here.'

'I dare say it would. I'll get a person despatched to you by the mail train, if I am back in time. Your husband must not be left to himself. That is a vital point. Still, so long as he is reasonable, and shows no sign of violence, it will not do to let him suppose that he is watched; that would aggravate

matters. You must be diplomatic. Let the man pass as an extra servant, not a professional nurse. All invalids detest professional nurses.'

'Is this dreadful malady likely to pass away?' asked Ida, falteringly.

It was unspeakably painful to her to discuss her husband's failing; and yet she wanted to learn all that could be known about it.

'Undoubtedly. Remove the cause, and the effect will cease. But you have to do more than that. You have to restore the constitution to its normal state—to renew the tissues which intemperance has destroyed—in a word, to eliminate the poison; and then the craving for drink will cease, and your husband may begin life again, like Naaman after his seventh dip in Jordan. At Mr. Wendover's age, such a habit ought not to be fatal. There is ample time for reform; but I give you fair warning that it is not an easy disease to cure. I'm not talking of delirium tremens, which is a symptom rather than a disease, but of alcoholic poisoning. The craving for alcohol once established is an ugly weed to root out.'

'If patience and care can cure him, he shall be cured,' said Ida, with a steadfast look, which gave new nobility to her beautiful face in the observant eyes of the physician—a man keen to appreciate every gradation of the physical and the mental, and to tell to the nicest shade where sense left off and soul began. Here was a woman assuredly in whom soul predominated over sense.

'I believe that, madam,' he said, kindly; 'and you shall have my best assistance, depend upon it.'

'Why should a young man bring upon himself such an affliction as this?' Ida asked, wonderingly. 'Ours is counted a sober era.'

'Why, indeed? After-dinner boozing and three-bottle men are a tradition of the dark ages; and yet there are dozens of young men in London—gifted young men some of them—who are doing this thing every year. Half the untimely deaths you hear of might be traced home to the brandy bottle, if a man had only the curiosity to look into first causes. One man dies of congestion of the lungs. Yes, but he had burnt up his lungs first with perpetual alcohol. Another is a victim to

liver. Why, madam, a temperate man may work thirty years under an Indian sun, and hardly know that he has a liver. Another is said to have died of too much brain work. Yes, work done by a brain steeped in alcohol—not a brain, but a preparation in spirits. They all do the same thing—pegging—pegging—pegging—from breakfast to bedtime; and most of them would deny that they are drunkards.'

'Do you think that if my husband drank it was because he was not happy—because he had something on his mind?'

'Much more likely that it was because he had nothing on his mind, my dear madam. These briefless barristers in the Temple—men with private means, not obliged to hunt for work, with a little fancy for literature, and a little taste for the drama—these idle youths, whose only idea of social intercourse is to be gossiping and drinking in one another's rooms all day long, living an undomestic life in chambers, without the public interests or athletic sports of a university — these are the chosen victims of alcohol. Of course, I don't

pretend for a moment that they all drink; but where the tendency to drink exists this is the kind of life to foster it.'

'My husband was not obliged to live in chambers—he had a home here.'

'Yes; but young men, unless they are sportsmen, hate the country; and then, once in the London vortex, a man can't easily escape. And now, I suppose, I had better go and see the patient. Does he know I have been sent for?'

'No.'

'Then perhaps we shall have a scene. He may be angry.'

'I must risk that,' said Ida, firmly. 'He refused to be treated by our family doctor, and I felt that things could not go on any longer as they were going on.'

She led the way to Brian's room. He was lounging by the open window, smoking; his books and papers were scattered about the tables in reckless disorder.

'Dr. Mallison has come to see you, Brian,' said Ida, quietly, as the physician followed her into the room.

'You sent for him, then?' exclaimed Brian starting up angrily.

'There was no alternative; you refused to be attended by Mr. Fosbroke.'

'Fosbroke—a village apothecary, the parish doctor, who would have poisoned me. Yes, I should think so. How dare you send for anyone? How dare you treat me like a child?'

'I dare do anything which I believe to be for your good,' Ida answered, unflinchingly.

He quailed before her, and changed his tone in a moment. 'Well, if it gratifies you to spend your money upon physicians——How do you do, Dr. Mallison. Of course I am very glad to see you, as a friend; but I want no doctoring.'

'I'm afraid you do,' said the physician. 'You have not done what I told you when I saw you in London.'

'What was that?'

'To give up all stimulants.'

'Oh, that was impossible! It's just like asking a man to shut his mouth, and breathe only through his nostrils, when he has lived all his life with

his mouth open. No man can change his habits all at once, at the fiat of a physician. But I have been very moderate ever since I saw you.'

'And yet you have had another attack?'

'Who told you that?' asked Brian, with an angry glance at his wife.

'Your own appearance tells me—yes, and your pulse. You have been indulging in the old habits—nipping all day long; and you have been sleeping badly.'

'Sleeping badly!' muttered Brian moodily; 'I wish to Heaven I could sleep anyhow. I have forgotten the sensation of being asleep—I don't know what it means. Just as I fancy myself dropping off there comes a flash of light in my eyes, and I am broad awake again. The other night I thought it lightened perpetually, but my wife said there was no lightning.'

'A case of shattered nerves, and all your own doing,' said Dr. Mallison. 'You must leave off brandy.'

'Brandy has left me off,' retorted Brian. 'My wife and her step-mother have gone in for strict

economy. I am not allowed a spoonful of cognac, although I tell them it is the only thing that staves off racking neuralgic pains.'

'You must endure neuralgia rather than go on poisoning yourself with brandy. For you alcohol is rank poison—you are suffering now from the cumulative effect of all you have taken within the last twelve months. There are men who can drink with impunity—go on drinking hard through a long life; but you are not one of those. Drink for you means death.'

'A man can die but once,' grumbled Brian; 'and an early death is better than an aimless life.'

'For shame,' said the physician. 'If I had such a wife as you have, the aim of my life would be to make myself worthy of her, and to win distinction for her sake.'

'Ah, there was a time when I thought the same,' answered Brian; 'but that's over and done with.'

Ida left the doctor and his patient together, and walked up and down the corridor outside her husband's room, waiting to hear Dr. Mallison's final directions. He remained closeted with Brian for about a quarter of an hour.

'I have said all I could, and I have written a prescription which may do some good,' he told Ida; 'this is a case for moral suasion rather than medical treatment. If you can exercise a good influence over your husband, and keep all stimulants away from him, he will recover. But his constitution has been undermined by bad habits—an indolent unhealthy life—a life spent in hot rooms, by artificial light. Get him out of doors as much as you can, without exposing him to bad weather or undue fatigue. He is very weak, and altogether out of gear; and you mustn't expect much improvement until he recovers tone and appetite; but if you can ward off any return of the delirium, that will be something gained.'

'Indeed it will. The delirium was too terrible.'

'Well, keep all drink away from him.'

'Even if he seems to suffer for want of it?'

'Yes. The old-fashioned idea was that stopping a man's drink suddenly would bring on an attack of delirium tremens; but we know better than that now. We know that the delirium is only a consequence of alcoholic poisoning, and inevitable where that goes on.'

Ida went back to the drawing-room with the doctor. The tea-table was ready, and there were decanters and sandwiches on another table. Dr. Mallison took a cup of tea and a sandwich, while he gave Ida minute directions as to the treatment of the patient. And then he accepted the handsome cheque which had been written for him, with Mr. Fosbroke's advice as to amount, and took his departure, promising to send a skilled attendant within the next twelve hours.

Ida felt happier after she had seen Dr. Mallison. There was very little that could be done for her husband. He had sown his wild oats, and that light scattering of the seeds of folly had been pleasant enough, no doubt, in the time of sowing; and this was the unanticipated result—a bitter harvest of care and pain which had to be endured somehow.

And now came for that household at Wimperfield a period of agonising trouble and fear. The boy's illness developed into an acute attack of rheumatic fever, and for three dreadful days and nights his life trembled in the balance. Not once did Ida enter her husband's room during that awful period of fear.

She could not steel herself to look upon the man whose sin, or whose folly, had brought this evil on her beloved one. 'My murdered boy,' she kept repeating to herself. Even on her knees, when she tried to pray, humbly and meekly appealing to the Fountain of mercy and grace—even then, while she knelt with bowed head and folded hands, those awful words flashed into her mind. Her murdered boy.

If he were to die, who could doubt that his death would lie at Brian's door? who could put away the dark suspicion that Brian had wantonly, and with murderous intent, exposed the delicate child to bad weather and long hours of fasting and fatigue.

CHAPTER V.

'AND, IF I DIE, NO SOUL WILL PITY ME.'

AT last their long watchings, their tender care, directed by one of the most famous men in London—who was summoned to Wimperfield at Mr. Fosbroke's suggestion within a week of Dr. Mallison's visit—and attended twice or thrice a day by the clever apothecary, were rewarded by the assurance that the time of immediate danger was over, and that now a slow and gradual recovery might fairly be anticipated. It was only then that Ida could bring herself to face Brian again, and even then she met him with an icy look, as if the life within her were frozen by grief and care, and those rigid lips of hers could never again melt into smiles.

Brian had been leading a fitful and wandering life during the boy's illness, watched and waited upon by Towler, the man from London, with whom

he quarrelled twenty times a day, and who needed his long experience of the "ways" of alcoholic victims to enable him to endure the fitfulness and freakishness of his present charge.

Warned by Dr. Mallison that he must spend as much of his life in the open air as possible, Brian had taken to going in and out of the house fifty times a day, now wandering for five or ten minutes in the garden, anon rambling as far as the edge of the park, then running into the stable yard, and ordering a horse to be saddled instantly, but never mounting the horse. After seeing the animal led up and down the yard once or twice, he would always find some excuse for not riding; the fact being that he had no longer courage enough to get into the saddle. His riding days were over. Even the stable mastiff, an old favourite with Brian, gave him a painful shock when the great tawny brute leapt out of his kennel, straining at his chain, and baying deep-mouthed thunder by way of friendly greeting.

Towler had a hard time of it, following his charge here and there, waiting upon him, bearing

his abuse; but Towler had a peculiar gift, a faculty for getting on with patients of this kind. He knew how to dodge, and follow, and circumvent them; how to take liberties with them, and scold them, without too deeply wounding their *amour-propre;* how to humour and manage them; and although Mr. Wendover quarrelled with his attendant fifty times a day, he yet liked the man, and tolerated his presence; and had already come to lean upon him, and to be angry when Towler absented himself.

'Well,' said Brian, looking up as Ida entered his room on that happy morning on which she had been told that her brother was out of danger; 'the boy is better, I hear?'

These things are quickly known in a household, when there has been general anxiety about the issue of an illness.

'Yes, he is better. By God's grace, he will live; but his life has trembled in the balance. Brian, it would have been your fault if he had died.'

'Would it? Yes, I suppose, indirectly I should have been the cause. I was a fool to take him

out that morning; but,' shrugging his shoulders, I wanted a ramble, and I wanted company. Who could tell there would be such a diabolical storm, or that we should lose our way? Thank God he is out of danger. Poor little beggar! Did you think I wanted to put him out of the way?' he asked suddenly, looking at her with a keen flash of interrogation.

'To think that would be to think you a murderer,' she answered coldly. 'I have thought that you had little affection for him or for me when you exposed him to that danger: and then I schooled myself to think better of you—to remember that, perhaps, on that day you were hardly responsible for your actions.'

'In fact, that I was a lunatic,' said Brian.

'I would rather think you mad than wicked.'

'Perhaps I am neither. Why have you put that man as a spy upon me?'

The discreet Towler had retired into the adjacent bedroom during this conversation.

'He is not a spy. Dr. Mallison said you ought to have a servant specially to wait upon you, that in your sleepless nights you might not be left alone.'

'No, they are a trial, those long nights. Towler is not a bad fellow, but he irritates me sometimes. Last night he let a black-muzzled gipsy brute hide behind my curtains, and then told me it was my "delusions." Delusions! when I saw the fellow as plain as I see you now.'

Ida was silent. She had hoped that the patient had passed this stage, and was on the road to recovery of health and reason. She interrogated Towler by-and-by, and he assured her that Mr. Wendover had taken no stimulants since he had been attending upon him.

'Are you sure he cannot get any without your knowledge?' Ida asked. 'Dr. Mallison told me that in this malady a patient is terribly artful—that he will contrive to evade the closest watchfulness, if it is any way possible to get drink.'

'Ah, that's true enough, ma'am,' sighed the man; 'there's no getting to the bottom of their artfulness: but I'm an old hand, and I know all the ins and outs of the complaint. It isn't possible for Mr. Wendover to get any drink in this house, and he never goes out of it without me. Every drop of

wine and spirits is under lock and key, and all the servants are warned against giving him anything.'

Ida sighed, full of shame at the thought that her husband, the man whom it was her duty to honour and obey, should be degraded by such humiliating precautions; and yet there was no help for it. He had brought himself to this pass. This is the end of ambrosial nights, the feast of reason, the flow of soul, wit drowned in whiskey, satire stimulated by brandy and soda.

Ida went back to her brother's room. It was there her love, her fears, her cares were all concentrated. Duty might make her careful and thoughtful for her husband, but here love was paramount. To sit by his pillow, to talk to him, or read to him, or pray for him, to minister to him, jealous of the skilled nurse who had been hired to perform these offices,—these things were her delight. Lady Palliser, worn out with watching and anxiety, had now broken down altogether, and had consented to take a long day's rest; but Ida's more energetic nature could do

with much less rest—half an hour's delicious sleep now and then, with her head on her darling's pillow, was all-sufficient to restore her.

And so the blessed days of hope went on, and every morning and every afternoon Mr. Fosbroke's report was more favourable. It was a tedious recovery from a cruel disease, happily shortened by at least two-thirds of its old-fashioned length by modern treatment; but all was going well, and the hearts of the watchers were at ease. The boy lay swathed in cotton wool, very helpless, very languid, fed and petted from morning till night, like a young bird brought up by hand; and Ida and her step-mother had to be patient and thankful.

Ida had often thought during the boy's illness of the man who had found him, and brought him safely home to them on that anxious day; and she wished much to testify her gratitude to the misanthropic dweller in the gamekeeper's cottage; but she hesitated as to her manner of approaching him. To go herself would be futile, when he had so obdurately shut his door against her. Then she

had Vernon's assurance that this Bohemian hated women. She might have sent a servant with a message; but she had reason to know, from Vernon's description of the man, that he was altogether above the servant class, and would be likely to resent such a form of approach. She might have written to him; but her pride recoiled from that course, remembering his cavalier treatment of her. And so she let the days slip by, until Vernon began to recover strength and good spirits, and to inquire about his friend.

'I want Jack to come and see me, and sit with me,' said the boy; 'he could come to tea couldn't he, mother? You wouldn't mind, would you?'

'My dear, he is not a proper person for you to associate with,' replied Lady Palliser. 'You oughtn't to bemean yourself by associating with your inferiors.'

'Bemean fiddlesticks!' cried Vernie; 'I don't believe there *is* such a word. Jack is the cleverest man I know—cleverer than Mr. Jardine, and that's saying a great deal.'

Vainly did the widow endeavour to awaken her son's mind to the great gulf which divides a baronet from a hawker—a gulf not to be bridged over by the genius of a Dalton or a Whewell—and to those nice distinctions which obtain between a casual out-of-door intercourse with a man of this class, and a deliberate invitation to tea.

'When I'm well enough to go out I can go to him,' answered Vernon, doggedly; 'but now I'm ill he must come to me; and it's very unkind of you not to let him come. Blow his station in life! if he was a duke I shouldn't want him.'

'I can't think what you can want with this low person, when Ida and I are always doing everything to amuse you,' moaned Lady Palliser.

'Ida's a darling, and you too, mother,' said the boy, putting his thin little arms round his mother's neck. He was now just able to move those poor arms, which had been so racked with pain a little while ago. 'But I get tired of everything—Shakespeare, Dickens, even. It's so long to stay in bed; and I think Jack would amuse me more than anyone, if you'd let him come.'

'He shall come, darling. Is there anything I could refuse you?' said the mother eagerly, moved by the sight of tears in Vernon's innocent blue eyes.

'Ask him to come to tea this afternoon.'

'Yes, love; I'll go and see about it this minute.'

Lady Palliser went in quest of Ida, who was sitting in Brian's study reading, while her husband wrote, or made believe to write, at a table in the window piled with books of reference, which he consulted every now and then, lolling back in his chair and reading listlessly—altogether a mere show and pretence of study, never likely to result in anything—a weary dawdling away of the long summer morning.

To Ida, Lady Palliser explained her difficulty. A note of some kind must be written to this Cheap Jack; and the little woman did not know how to word that note.

'If I say, "Lady Palliser presents her compliments to Mr. Cheap Jack, and requests the pleasure of his company," it seems like putting myself on a level with him, don't you know. I wish you'd write for me, Ida.'

'Willingly, dear mother; but I'm afraid the man won't come. He is such a very rough diamond.'

'Oh! but surely he will be gratified at an invitation to tea!'

'I'm afraid not. But I'll write at once. Anything to please Vernon.' Ida wrote as follows:—

'Sir Vernon Palliser, who is slowly recovering from a serious illness, will be very pleased if his friend Jack will spend an hour or two with him this afternoon. Any hour convenient to Jack will be agreeable to Sir Vernon, but he would much like Jack to drink tea with him between four and five. The other members of the family will not intrude upon the sick room while Jack is there.'

'I think that will do,' said Ida; and Lady Palliser carried off the note, wondering at her step-daughter's cleverness, yet inclined to fear that the hermit of Blackman's Hanger might be offended at being addressed as Jack, *tout court*; and yet how could one deal ceremoniously with a man who acknowledged no surname, and was known to all the neighbourhood only as 'Cheap Jack'?

Mr. Fosbroke came for his noontide visit just after this business of the letter, and found Ida and her step-mother both with the invalid. He was told what they had done.

'Do you think he'll come?' Vernon asked, eagerly.

'I should think he would, Sir Vernon,' answered the doctor; 'for I know he takes a keen interest in your recovery. All the time you were really bad he used to hang about the Park gate every day as I went out, and stopped me to ask how you were. And he asked after you, too, Mrs. Wendover, —seemed to be afraid your anxiety about this little man would be too much for you.'

'Remarkably polite of him,' said Ida, laughing; yet he treated me in the most bearish manner when I went to his cottage.'

If he is a bear, he is a bear with gentlemanly instincts,' replied the doctor. 'Nothing could be more respectful, more delicate, than his inquiries about you; and I could see by the expression of his eyes that he really felt for you. He has very fine eyes.'

'One of the tokens of his gipsy blood, I suppose, said Ida.

'Yes; I believe he is a gipsy. They are a keen-witted race.'

'A gipsy!—and with so much plate as there is in this house!' exclaimed Lady Palliser. 'Oh, Vernie, you ought not to have asked me to ask him!'

'Don't be afraid, mother,' said Ida; 'he shall be sharply looked after, if he does come.'

'Looked after, indeed! Why, you might give him the run of a silver mine. What does he care for your trumpery silver spoons?' cried Vernon contemptuously.

The invalid was doomed to disappointment. About two hours after Ida's letter had been despatched, a small boy brought Cheap Jack's reply, to the following effect:—

'Jack is very sorry he cannot drink tea with his little friend——'

'Little friend, indeed! What vulgar familiarity!' exclaimed Lady Palliser.

'But he belongs to the dwellers in tents, and would be out of place in a fine house——'

'Then he *is* a gipsy,' said Lady Palliser. 'What a lucky escape!'

'He looks forward to the pleasure of seeing Sir Vernon on the Hanger before long. Meanwhile he can only send his duty and best wishes for Sir Vernon's speedy recovery.'

'The end is a little better than the commencement,' said Lady Palliser; 'but I call it a great liberty for a Cheap Jack to talk of my son as his little friend.'

'He might have left out "little," considering that I shall be twelve next birthday,' said Vernon with dignity. 'But I am his friend, mother; and I mean to be his friend always. And when I am grown up I shall take him to the Rocky Mountains, and we will hunt moose and things.'

Lady Palliser sighed, and hoped that this passion for low company would pass with the other follies of childhood.

Now that all danger was past, and that Vernon was on the high road to health, Ida spent the greater part of her time in attendance upon her husband. It was her duty, she told herself; and

she who had so failed in love must needs fulfil every duty. But the performance of this simple, wifely duty of attendance on an invalid husband was fraught with pain: his temper was so irritable, his mind was so weak, his whole being so degraded and sunk by his infirmity, that the progress of his decay was, of all forms of dissolution, the most painful for the looker-on. That he was sinking into a lower depth of degradation, rather than recovering, was sadly obvious to Ida, in spite of occasional intervals of better feeling and rare flashes of his old brightness.

The case was altogether perplexing. Towler admitted that he was more puzzled than he had ever been about any patient whom he had enjoyed the honour of attending. Mr. Wendover, under his present conditions of absolute sobriety, and with youth on his side, ought to have shown a decided improvement by this time; and yet there was no substantial amelioration of his state, and his latest fit of the horrors, which occurred only a night ago, had been quite as bad as the first which Towler had witnessed.

'You do not think that he gets brandy without your knowledge?' inquired Ida, blushing at the question.

'No, ma'am; I'm too careful for that. I've searched his trunks even, and every cupboard in his rooms; and I've looked behind the registers of the stoves, which are very handy places for patients hiding bottles in summer time; but there's not so much as an ounce phial. And Mr. Wendover's hardly out of my sight, except when he takes his bath, or just going in and out of his bath-room, where he keeps his pipes, as you know, ma'am. Besides, even if he had any hiding-place for the drink, who is likely to supply him with it?'

'No; I hope there is no one,' said Ida thoughtfully. 'I hope no one in this house would so betray my confidence.'

'I've taken stock of all the servants, ma'am, and I don't think there's one that would do it.'

Ida was of the same opinion. The servants were old servants, as loyal to the heads of the house as a highland clan to their chief.

Sunday came—a peaceful summer Sabbath—a

day of sunshine and azure sky, and Ida, whose anxiety about Vernon had kept her away from her parish church for the last three Sundays, was able to set out upon her walk to the village with a heart quite at rest on the boy's account. Even the mother could find no excuse for staying at home with her boy, and felt that conscience and society alike required that she should assist at the service of her parish church. Vernie was convalescent, able to sit up in his bed, propped with pillows, and eat hot-house grapes, and turn over the leaves of endless volumes of *Punch*, laughing with his hearty childish laugh at Leech's jokes and the curious garments of a departed era.

'How could men wear such trowsers? and how could women wear such bonnets?' he asked his mother, wonderingly contemplating fashionable youth as represented by the great pen-and-ink humourist.

'I don't know why we shouldn't wear them, Vernie,' said his mother with rather an offended air; 'those spoon bonnets were very becoming. I wore one the day your pa first saw me.'

'And hoops under your gown? like that,' said

Vernie, pointing; 'and those funny little boots? What a guy you must have looked!'

When a boy has come to this pass he may fairly be left with servants for a couple of hours; so Lady Palliser put on her stateliest mourning—her thick corded silk, flounced with crape, and her Mary Stuart bonnet, and went across the park, and up hill and down hill, for it was a country of hills and hollows—to the parish church of Wimperfield, a very ancient edifice, with massive columnar piers, Norman groined roof, and walls enriched by a grand array of memorial tablets, setting forth the honours and virtues of those dead and gone land-owners whose bones were mouldering in the vaults below the square oaken pews in which the living worshipped. In the chancel there was the usual stately monument to some magnate of the middle ages, who was represented kneeling by his wife's side, with a graduated row of sons and daughters kneeling behind them, as if the whole family had died and petrified simultaneously, in the act of pious worship.

Ida did not invite her husband to join her in her Sabbath devotions, assured that he would claim an invalid's privilege to stay at home. He had very rarely attended the parish church with his wife, affecting to despise such humdrum and conventional worship. He had just that thin smattering of modern science which enables shallow youth to make a merit of disbelief in all things beyond the limit of mathematical demonstration. He had skimmed Darwin, and spoke lightly of mankind as the latest development of time and matter, and no higher a being, from a spiritual point of view, than the first worm that wriggled in its primeval slime. He had dipped into Herbert Spencer, and talked largely of God as the Unknowable; and how could the Unknowable be supposed to take pleasure in the automatic prayers of a handful of bumpkins and clodhoppers met together in a mouldy old church, time out of mind the temple of superstitions and ceremonies. The vast temple of the universe was Brian Walford's idea of a church; and a very fine church it is, if a man will only worship faithfully therein; but the man who abandons formal prayers

and set seasons of devotion with a vague idea of worshipping in the woodland or on the hill top, very rarely troubles himself to realise his ideal.

Brian's broadly-declared agnosticism had long been a cause of pain and grief to his wife. She had felt that this alone would have made sympathy impossible between them, had there been no other ground for difference. She thought with a bitter sense of contrast of his cousin, who was a student and a thinker, and who yet was not ashamed to believe and to worship as a little child. Surely it was not a sign of a weak intelligence for a man to believe in something better and higher than himself, when Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and Virgil could so believe. Brian Walford's idea of cleverness was to consider himself the ultimate product of incalculable antecedent time, the full stop of creation.

Here were all the pious parishioners, the county families, and the country bumpkins meekly kneeling on their knees, and uplifting their voices in perfect faithfulness—not thinking very deeply of any element in the service perhaps, but honest in their reverence and their love. The old church was a

pretty sight on such a summer morning—the white robes of the choristers touched with supernal radiance, the light tempered by the deep rubies and purples and ambers in windows old and new—the very irregularities and architectural anomalies of the building producing a quaintness which was more pleasing than absolute beauty.

The litany was nearly over when Ida heard a familiar step on the stone pavement of the nave. It was Brian's step; and presently he stopped at the door of the high oaken pew, opened it, and came in and seated himself on the bench, opposite to the spot where she knelt by her step-mother's side. It was a capacious old pew, and would have held ten people. Brian kicked about the hassocks, and made himself comfortable; but he did not kneel, or take any part in the service. He sat with his elbows on his knees, and his chin in his hands, staring at the floor. His presence filled Ida with anxiety. He had not risen from his bed when she left home, and Towler had given her to understand that he would not get up for some time, as he had had a very bad night. He must have risen and dressed

hurriedly in order to follow her to church. His eyes had the wild look in them which she had noticed on the night when he saw visions.

It was in vain that Ida tried after this to fix her mind upon the service—every movement, every look of Brian's, alarmed her. She was thankful for the high pew which sheltered him from the gaze of the congregation; and presently when they stood up to sing a hymn, she was glad that Brian remained seated, albeit there was irreverence in the attitude.

But when the last verse was being sung, he rose suddenly and looked all round the church with those wild eyes of his, took up a book and turned the leaves abstractedly, and remained standing like a sleep-walker for a minute or so, after the congregation had gone down on their knees for the communion service.

When the gospel was read he rose again, and lolled with his back against the plastered wall, his head just under a winged cherub head in marble, which adorned the base of a memorial tablet. This time he stood till all the service was over, so obviously apart from all the rest of the congregation,

so evidently uninterested in anything that was going on, that Ida felt as if every eye must be watching him, every creature in the church conscious of his infirmity. He was carelessly dressed, his collar awry, his necktie loose, his hair unbrushed. His very appearance was a disgrace, which Lady Palliser, whose great object in life was to maintain her dignity before the eyes of the county families, felt could hardly be lived down in the future.

That pale haggard countenance, those bloodshot, wandering eyes,—surely every creature in the church must know that they meant brandy!

The sermon began—one of those orthodox, old-fashioned, dry-as-dust sermons often heard in village churches, a discourse which sets out with a small point in Bible history, not having any obvious bearing upon modern thought or modern life, and discusses, and explains, and enlarges upon it with deliberate scholarship for about half-an-hour, and then, in a brisk five minutes, endeavours to show how the conduct of Ahab, or Jehoram, or Ahaziah, in this little matter, was an exact counterpart or paradigm of our conduct, my dear brethren, when we, etc., etc.

The Vicar had not arrived at this point, but was still expatiating upon the unbridled wickedness of Jehoram, when Brian, who after a period of alarming restlessness had been sitting like a statue for the last few minutes, suddenly started up, and exclaimed wildly, 'I can't endure it a moment longer—the stench of corruption—the dead rotting in their graves—the horrid, nauseous odour of grave-clothes—the foul stink of earth-worms! How can you bear it? You must have no feeling! you must be made of stone!'

Ida and her step-mother had both risen, each in her way, was trying to soothe, to quiet him, to induce him to sit down again. The Vicar had stopped in his discourse, scared by that other voice, but as Brian's loud accents sank into mutterings he took up the thread of his argument, and went on denouncing Jehoram.

'Brian, indeed there is nothing—no bad odour here.'

'Yes, there is the stench of death,' he protested, staring at the ground, and then pointing with a convulsive movement of his wasted hand he

cried, 'Don't you see, under that seat there, the worms crawling up through the rotten flooring, there? there!—fifty—a hundred—legion. For God's sake get me out of this charnel house! I can hear the dry bones rattle as the worms swarm out of the mouldering coffins.'

His deadly pallor, his countenance convulsed with disgust, showed how real this horror was to him. Ida put her hand through his arm, and led him quietly away, out of the stony church into the glow of the summer noontide.

He sank exhausted upon a grassy mound in the churchyard—a village child's grave, with the rose wreath which loving hands had woven fading above the sod.

'How can you sit in such a vault?' he asked; 'how can you live in such foul air?'

'Indeed, dear Brian, it is only fancy. There is nothing amiss.'

'There is everything amiss. Death is everywhere—we begin to die directly we are born—life is a descending scale of decay—we rot and rot and rot as we walk about the world, pretending to be

alive. First a man loses his teeth, and then his hair, and then he looks in the glass and sees himself withered, and haggard, and wrinkled, and knows that the skeleton's clutch is upon him. I tell you we are always dying. Why go to that vault yonder,' pointing to the church, 'to breathe the concentrated essence of mortality ?'

'It is good for us to remember the dead when we worship God, Brian. He is the God of the dead as well as the living. There is nothing terrible in death, if we believe.'

'If we believe ! If ! The whole future is an "if !" The future ! What future can there be for us ? We came from nothing, we go back to nothing—we are resolved into the elements which renew the earth for new comers. The wheel of progress is always revolving—for the mass there is eternity, infinity—no beginning, no end ; but for the individual, his little span of life begins and ends in corruption.'

The sound of the organ and the fresh rustic voices singing a familiar hymn told Ida that the sermon was over. Lady Palliser was in an agony of anxiety to get Brian way before the congregation came out. She and

Ida contrived to beguile him out of the churchyard and away towards Wimperfield Park by a meadow path which was but little frequented. He grew more rational as they walked home, but talked and argued all the way with that semi-hysterical garrulity which was so painful to his hearers.

They found Vernon sitting up in bed, reading "Grimm's Goblins," and in very high spirits. A most wonderful event had happened. Cheap Jack had been to see him. He came with Mr. Fosbroke at twelve o'clock. He had overtaken Mr. Fosbroke in the park, and had asked leave to go up to the house with him, just for a peep at his patient.

'He only stayed a quarter of an hour,' said Vernie, 'for old Fos was in a hurry; but it was such fun! He made me laugh all the time, and Fos laughed, too,—he couldn't help it; and he said Jack's funny talk was better for me now than all the medicine in his surgery; and I am to get up for an hour or two this afternoon; and I am to have some chicken, and as much asparagus as ever I can eat—and in less than a week I shall be able to go up to the Hanger and see Jack.'

'My darling, you will have to be much stronger first,' said Ida.

'Oh, but I am very strong now. Ah, there's Brian,' as his brother-in-law looked in at the door. 'What a time since you've been to see me! You've been ill, too, mother said. Come in, Brian. Don't mind about giving me a bad cold that day. It wasn't your fault.'

Brian came into the room with a hang-dog look, and sat by the boy's bed.

'Yes, it was my fault, Vernie. I am a wretched creature. Everything that I do ends badly. I didn't mean to do you any harm.'

'Of course not. You thought it was fun, and so did I, till I got tired and hungry. But those men who were chasing you! There were no men, were there? *I* didn't see any,' said the boy, with his clear blue eyes on Brian's haggard face.

'Yes, they were there, dodging behind the trees. I saw them plain enough,' answered Brian, moodily. 'It was about that business I told you of. No, I couldn't tell you; it was not a thing to tell a child—a shameful accusation; but I have given them the slip.'

'Brian,' said Ida, laying her hand on his shoulder, 'why do you say these things? You know you are talking nonsense.'

'Am I?' he muttered, cowering as he looked up at her. 'Well, it's as likely as not. Ta, ta, Vernie! You're as well as ever you were. It is I who am booked for a coffin!'

He went away with his feeble shuffling steps, so unlike the step of youth; Ida following him, thinking sadly of the autumn afternoons when he used to come leaping out of his boat—young, bright, and seemingly full of life and energy, and when she half believed she loved him.

CHAPTER VI.

JOHN JARDINE SOLVES THE MYSTERY.

THE Jardines came the next day, self-invited guests. Ida had tried to prevent any such visit, in her desire to keep her husband's degradation from the knowledge of his kindred; but Bessie was not to be so put off. She had heard that Brian was ill, and that Vernon had been dangerously ill; and her heart overflowed with love and compassion for her friend. It was not easy for Mr. Jardine to leave his parish, but he would have done a more difficult thing rather than see his wife unhappy; so on the Monday morning after that scene in the church, Ida received a telegram to say that Mr. and Mrs. Jardine were going to drive over to see her, and that they would claim her hospitality for a couple of days.

It was a drive of over thirty miles, only to be

done by a merciful man between sunrise and sunset. Mr. and Mrs. Jardine started at five o'clock, breakfasted and lunched on the road, and brought their faithful steed, Drummer Boy, up to the Wimperfield portico at seven in the evening, with not a hair turned. Ida was waiting for them in the portico.

'You darling, how pale and worried you look!' exclaimed Bessie, as she hugged her friend; 'and why didn't you let me come before?'

'You could have done me no good, dear, when my troubles were at the worst. Thank God the worst is over now—Vernie is getting on splendidly. He was downstairs to-day, and ate such a dinner. We were quite afraid he would bring on a relapse from over-eating. He is delighted at the idea of seeing you and Mr. Jardine.'

'Has he gone to bed? I'll go up to see him at once, if I may,' said John Jardine.

'He is in his own room. He asked to stop up till seven on purpose to see you.'

'Then I'll go to him this instant.'

The luggage had been brought out of the light

T cart, and the Drummer Boy had been led round to the stables. Ida took Bessie to a room at the end of the house, remote from Brian's apartments.

'Why, this isn't our usual room!' said Bessie, astonished.

'No, I thought this would be a pleasanter room in such warm weather. It looks east,' Ida answered, rather feebly.

'It's a very nice room; only I felt more at home in the other. I have occupied it so often, you know, I felt almost as if it were my own. Oh, you cruel girl! why didn't you let me come sooner? I wanted so to be with you in your trouble; and I offered to come directly I heard Vernie was ill!'

'I know, dear; but you could have done no good. We were in God's hands. We could only pray and wait.'

'Love can always do good. I could have comforted you!'

'Nothing could have comforted me if he had died.'

'And Brian—poor Brian, has been ill, too. I thought him very much changed when we were here—so thin, so nervous, so depressed.'

'Yes, he was ill then—he is very ill now. We take all the care we can of him, but he doesn't get any better.'

'Poor dear Brian! and he was once the soul of fun and gaiety—used to sing comic songs so capitally. I suppose it is a poor thing for a man to do, but it was very nice, especially at Christmas time. There are so few people who can do anything to help one over Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Brian was good at everything—charades, clumps, consequences, dumb crambo. And to think that he should be ill so long! What is his complaint, Ida?' asked Bessie, suddenly becoming earnest, after a lapse into childishness.

'It is a nervous complaint,' faltered Ida; 'he will soon get over it, I hope and believe, if we take proper care of him. He is very excitable, very unlike his old self; and you must not be astonished at anything he may say or do.'

'You don't mean that he is out of his mind?' said Bessie, with an awe-stricken look.

'No, no; nothing of the kind — at least, nothing that is likely to be lasting; but he has delusions sometimes—a kind of hysterical affection. Oh, Bessie, I did not want you to know anything; I tried to keep you away.'

Bessie had her arms round her old friend, and Ida, quite broken down by the fears and agitations of the last six weeks, hid her face upon Mrs. Jardine's shoulder and sobbed aloud. It was a complete collapse of heroic resolutions, of that unflinching courage and strength of mind which had sustained her so long; but it was also a blessed relief to the overcharged heart and brain.

'It is very selfish of me to plague you with my troubles,' she said, when Bessie had kissed and comforted her with every expression of sympathy and tenderness in the gamut of womanly love, 'but I wanted you to be prepared for the worst. And now, let me help you to change your gown, if you are going to make any change

for dinner. The gong will sound in less than half-an-hour.'

'Oh, those gongs, they always fill me with despair!' cried Bess. 'I am never ready when ours begins to buzz through the house, like a gigantic, melancholy-mad bumble bee. Of course I must change, dear; firstly, because I am smothered with dust, and sixthly, as Dogberry says, because I have brought a pretty gown to do honour to Wimperfield.'

And Bessie, rushing to her portmanteau, and tearing out its contents in a frantic way, shook out the laces and ribbons of a gracious Watteau-like arrangement in Madras muslin, while she chattered to her hostess.

'Shall I send for Jane Dyson?' the immaculate maid, who had lived with an Archbishop's wife. 'She can unpack your things.'

'Not for worlds. I have oceans to tell you, and I should hate that prim personage looking on and listening. Such news, Ida: Urania is engaged.'

'At last!'

'That was what everybody said. This was her sixth season, and it was rapidly becoming a case of real distress, and she was getting blue, oh, to a frightful extent—a perambulatory epitome of Huxley-cum-Darwin,—that's what our boys call her. And now, after refusing ever so many nice young men in the government offices because they were not rich enough for her, she is going to make a great match, and marry a nasty old man.'

'Oh, Bessie! nasty and old!'

'Strong language, isn't it? but the gentleman has been to Kingthorpe, and there is no doubt about the fact. One wouldn't mind his being elderly if he were only a gentleman; but he is not.'

'Then why in mercy's name, does Miss Rylance marry him?'

'Because he is Sir Tobias Vandilk, one of the richest men on the Stock Exchange. He is of Dutch extraction, they say; and this is supposed to account for his utter destitution with regard to English aspirates. He has a palace in Park Lane, and a park in Yorkshire; gives dinners of

a most *recherché* description every Thursday in the season; and immense shooting parties, at which I am told he and his friends slaughter quintillions of pheasants, and flood the London market every autumn; and it is whispered that he has lent money to royal personages.'

'Is Urania happy?'

'If she is not, I know who is. Dr. Rylance looks twenty years younger since the engagement. He was beginning to get weighed down by Urania. You remember with what a firm hand he managed her in days gone by? Well, after she took to Huxley and Darwin, and the rest of them, that was all over. She was always tripping him up with some little shred of scientific knowledge, fresh from Tyndall; always attacking his old-fashioned notions with some new light. He was as merry as a boy let loose from school when he came down to Kingthorpe the other day. He went to one of our picnics, and made himself tremendously agreeable. We took Sir Tobias to see the Abbey, and had afternoon tea there. He pretended to admire everything, but in a patronising way that made me savage; affected

to think Wendover Abbey a little bit of a place, as compared with his modern barrack in Yorkshire, with its riding-school, tan gallop, range of orchard-houses, picture-gallery, and so on. And Urania's grandeur is something too large for words. "You and Mr. Jardine must come and stay with us at Hanborough some day," she said, as if she were promising me a treat; so I told her plainly that my husband's parish work made such a visit impossible. "Oh, but some day," she said sweetly. "Never," said I; "we are rooted in the chalk of Salisbury Plain." "Poor things," she sighed, "what a destiny!"'

'And you all drank tea at the Abbey,' said Ida, musingly; 'dear old Abbey! I can fancy you there, in the long low library, with the afternoon sunlight shining in at the open windows, and Mary Stuart smiling at you from the panelling over one fire-place, and crafty Elizabeth looking sideways at you from over the other, and the Dijon roses clambering and twining round every lattice.'

How well you remember the old place.

Isn't it horrid of Brian to stay away all these years?'

'It is—rather eccentric.'

'Eccentric! It is positively wicked, when we know how agreeable he can make himself. Why, in that happy summer we spent at the Abbey he brightened all our lives. Didn't he, now, Ida?'

'He was very kind,' faltered Ida, like a slave, giving evidence under torture. 'Have you heard from him lately?'

'Not for more than a year, but father hears of him through his London agent, and we know he is well. He sent us all lovely presents last Christmas—Indian shawls, prayer-rugs, ivories, carved sandal-wood boxes. The Vicarage is glorified by his gifts.'

The gong began booming and buzzing as Bessie pinned a big yellow rose among the folds of her Madras fichu, and Mrs. Jardine and her hostess went down to the drawing-room lovingly, arms entwined, as in that long-ago holiday, when Ida was a guest at Kingthorpe.

Lady Palliser and Mr. Jardine were in the drawing-room talking to each other, while Brian paced up and down the room, pale and wan, as he had looked yesterday in the church. He offered his arm to Bessie at his wife's bidding, without a word. Mr. Jardine followed with Lady Palliser and Ida; and the little party of five sat down to dinner with a blight upon them, the awful shadow of domestic misery. There are many such dinners eaten every day in England—than which the Barmecide's was a more cheerful feast, a red herring and bread and butter in a garret a banquet of sweeter savour.

For the first two courses Brian preserved a sullen silence. He eat nothing—did not even pretend to eat—and drank the sherry and soda-water which was offered to him without comment. With the third course the butler who had supplied him with the prescribed amount of sherry, gave him plain soda-water.

He looked at his tumbler for a moment or so, and burst out laughing.

'Byron used to drink soda-water at dinners

when he was the rage in London society,' he said. 'It was *chic*, and Byron was like Sara Bernhardt—he would have done anything to get himself talked about.'

'I should have thought the fame he won by "Childe Harold" would have satisfied him, without any outside notoriety as a total abstainer,' said Mr. Jardine.

'Oh, if you think that, you don't know Byron,' exclaimed Brian. 'He wanted people always to be talking of him. A man may write the greatest book that was ever written, and the world will accept it, and put him on a pinnacle; but they soon leave off talking about him unless he does something. He must keep a bear in his rooms—quarrel with his wife — wear a pea-green overcoat — cross the channel in a balloon—and go on doing queer things — if he wants to be famous. Byron was an adept in the art of *réclame*—just a Whistler is on his smaller scale. It wasn't enough for Byron to be the greatest poet of modern Europe, he wanted to be the most notorious rake and *roué* into the bargain.'

'It was a curious nature,' said Mr. Jardine —'half gold, and half tinsel.'

'Ah, but the tinsel caught the public. I really don't think, for a man who wants to make a stir in his generation, a fellow could have played his cards better than Byron did.'

'It is a life that one can only contemplate with infinite pity and regret—a great nature, wrecked by small vices and smaller follies,' said Mr. Jardine; and then Brian took up the strain, and talked with loud assertiveness of the right of genius to do what it likes in the world, launching out into a broad declaration of infidelity and rank materialism which shocked and scared the three women who heard him.

Ida gave an imploring look at her stepmother, and they all three rose simultaneously, and hastily retired, driven away by that blatant blasphemy. John Jardine closed the door upon the ladies, and then went quietly back to his seat. He heard all that Brian had to say—he listened to his wild ramblings as to the voice of an oracle; and then, when Brian had poured out his little stock of

argument in favour of materialism, had quoted Aristotle, and Holbach, and Hume, and Comte, and Darwin, and had perverted their arguments against a personal God into the divine right of man to ruin his soul and body, John Jardine, who had read more of Aristotle than Brian knew of all the metaphysicians put together, and who had Plato, Kant, and Dugald Stewart in his heart of hearts, gravely took up the strain, and made mincemeat of Mr. Wendover's philosophy.

Brian listened meekly, and did not appear to take offence when the Vicar went on to warn him against the peril here and hereafter of a life misspent, a constitution ruined by self-indulgence, talents unused, opportunities neglected. The pale and haggard wretch sat cowering, as the voice of reproof and warning went on, solemnly, earnestly, with the warm sympathy which springs from perfect pity, from the Christian's wide love of his fellow-men.

'For your wife's—for your own sake—for the love of Him in whose image you were made—wrestle with the devil that possesses you,' said

John Jardine, when they had risen to leave the room, laying his hand affectionately upon Brian's shoulder. 'Believe me victory is possible.'

'Not now,' Brian answered with a semi-hysterical laugh. 'It is too late. There comes an hour, you know, even in your all-merciful creed, when the door is shut. Too late, ye cannot enter now. The door is shut upon me. I fooled my life away in London. It was pleasant enough while it lasted, but it's over now. I can say with Cleopatra—O, my life in Egypt, O the dalliance and the wit.'

They were in the hall by this time. The broad marble-paved hall, with its marble figures of gods and goddesses, of which nobody ever took any more notice than if they had been umbrella-stands. They were crossing the hall on their way to the drawing-room, when Brian suddenly clutched John Jardine's arm and reeled heavily against him, with an appalling cry.

'Hold me!' he screamed; 'hold me! I am going down!'

It was one of the dreadful symptoms of his

dreadful disease. All at once, with the solid black and white marble beneath his feet, he felt himself upon the edge of a precipice, felt himself falling, falling, falling, into a bottomless pit.

It was an awful feeling, a waking nightmare. He sank exhausted into John Jardine's arms, panting for breath.

'You are safe, it is only a momentary delusion,' said Mr. Jardine. 'Have you had that feeling often before?'

'Yes—sometimes—pretty often,' gasped Brian.

Mr. Jardine's wide reading and large experience as a parish priest had made him half a doctor. He knew that this was one of the symptoms of delirium tremens, and a symptom seen mostly in cases of a dangerous type. He had suspected the nature of Mr. Wendover's disease before now; but now he was certain of it.

He went with Brian to his room, advising him to lie down and rest. Brian appearing consentient, Mr. Jardine left him, with Towler in attendance.

In the drawing-room the Vicar contrived to get a little quiet talk with Ida, while at the

other end of the room Lady Palliser was expatiating to Bessie upon the minutest details of her boy's illness. He invited Ida's confidence, and frankly told her that he had fathomed the nature of Brian's disease.

'I have seen too many cases in the course of my parochial experience not to recognise the painful symptoms. I am so sorry for you, and for him. It is a bright young life thrown away.'

'Do you think he will not recover?'

'I think it is a very bad case. He is wasted to a shadow, and has a worn, haggard look that I don't like. And then he has those painful hallucinations—that idea of falling down a precipice, for instance, which are oftenest seen in fatal cases.'

Ida told him of the scene in the church yesterday—she confided in him fully—telling him all that Dr. Mallison had said of the case.

'What can I do?' she asked, piteously.

'I don't think you can do more than you are doing. That man who waits upon your husband is a nurse, I suppose?'

'Yes. Dr. Mallison sent him.'

'And care is taken that the patient gets no stimulants supplied to him?'

'Every care—and yet—'

'And yet what?'

'I have a suspicion—and I think Towler suspects too—that Brian does get brandy—somehow.'

'But how can that be, if your servants are honest, and this attendant is to be depended upon?'

'I can't tell you. I believe the servants are incapable of deceiving me. Towler, the attendant, comes to us with the highest character.'

'Well, I will be on the alert while I am with you,' said Mr. Jardine, and Ida felt as if he were a tower of strength. 'I have seen these sad cases, and had to do with them, only too often. On some occasions I have been happy enough to be the means of saving a man from his own folly.'

'Pray stop as long as you can with us, and do all you can,' entreated Ida. 'I wish I had asked you to come sooner, only I was so ashamed for him, poor creature. I thought it would be a wrong to him to let anyone know how low he had fallen.'

'It is part of my office to know how low humanity can fall, and yet be raised up again,' said Mr. Jardine.

'You won't tell Bessie—she would be so grieved for her cousin.'

'I will tell her nothing more than she can find out for herself. But you know she is very quick-witted.'

There was a change for the worse in Towler's charge next morning, when Ida, who still occupied the room adjoining her husband's bedchamber, went in at eight o'clock to inquire how he had passed the night. Brian was up, half dressed, pacing up and down the room, and talking incoherently. He had been up ever since five o'clock, Towler said; but it was impossible to get him to dress himself, or suffer himself to be dressed. A frightful restlessness had taken possession of him, more intense than any previous restlessness, and it was impossible to do anything for him. His hallucinations since daybreak had taken a frightful form—he had seen poisonous snakes gliding

in and out of the folds of the bedclothes; he had fancied every kind of hideous monster—the winged reptiles of the jura formation—the armour-plated fish of the old red sandstone—everything that is grotesque, revolting, terrible—skeletons, poison-spittting toads, vampires, were-wolves, flying cats—they had all lurked amidst the draperies of bed or windows, or grinned at him through the panes of glass.

'Look!' he shrieked, as Ida approached him, soothing, pleading in gentlest accents; 'look! don't you see them?' he cried, pointing to the shapes that seemed to people the room, and trying to push them aside with a restless motion of his hands; 'don't you see them, the lares and lemures? Look, there is Cleopatra with the asp at her breast! That bosom was once beautiful, and see now what a loathsome spectacle death has made it—the very worms recoil from that corruption. See, there is Canidia, the sorceress, who buried the boy alive! Look at her hair flying loose about her head! hair, no, those locks are living vipers! and Sagana, with hair erect, like the bristles of a wild boar! See, Ida,

how she rushes about, sprinkling the room with water from the rivers of hell! And Veia, whose cruel heart never felt remorse! Yes, he knew them well, Horace. These furies were the women he had loved and wooed!'

Fancies, memories flitted across his disordered brain, swift as lightning flashes. In a moment Canidia was forgotten, and he was Pentheus, struggling with Agave and her demented crew. They were tearing him to pieces, their fingers were at his throat. Then he was in the East, a defenceless traveller in the tropical desert, surrounded by Thugs. He pointed to one particular spot where he saw his insidious foe, he described the dusky supple figure, the sinuous limbs, gliding serpent-like towards him, the oiled body, the dagger in the uplifted hand. An illustration in Sir Charles Bell's classic treatise had flashed into his brain. So, from memory to memory, with a frightful fertility of fancy, his unresting brain hurried on; while his wife could only watch and listen, tortured by an agony greater than his own. To look on, and to be powerless to afford the slightest

help was dreadful. Up and down, and round about the room he wandered, talking perpetually, perpetually waving aside the horrid images which pursued and appalled him, his eyeballs in constant motion, the pupils dilated, his hollow cheeks deadly pale, his face bathed in perspiration.

'Send for Mr. Fosbroke,' said Ida, speaking on the threshold of the adjoining room, to the maid who brought her letters; and, in the midst of his distraction, Brian's quick ear caught the name.

'Fosbroke me no Fosbrokes!' he said. 'I will have no village apothecaries diagnosing my disease, no ignorant quack telling me how to treat myself.'

'I will telegraph for Dr. Mallison, if you like, Brian,' Ida answered gently; 'but I know Mr. Fosbroke is a clever man, and he perfectly understands—'

'Yes, he will have the audacity to tell you he knows what is the matter with me. He will say this is delirium tremens—a lie, and you must know it is a lie!'

To her infinite relief, Mr. Jardine appeared at this moment.

He questioned Towler as to the possibility of tranquillising his patient; and he found that the sedatives prescribed by Dr. Mallison had ceased to exercise any beneficial effect. Nights of insomnia and restlessness had been the rule with the patient ever since Towler had been in attendance upon him.

'I never knew such a brain, or such invention!' exclaimed Towler; 'the people, and the places, and the things he talks about is enough to make a man's hair stand on end.'

'The natural result of a vivid memory, and a good deal of desultory reading.'

'Most patients takes an idea and harps upon it,' said Towler. 'It's the multiplication table—or the day of judgment—or the volcanoes and hot-springs, and what you-may-call-ems, in the centre of the earth; and they'll go on over and over again—always coming back to the same point, like a merry-go-round; but this one is quite different. There's no bounds to his delusions. We're at the north pole one minute, and digging up diamonds in Africa the next.'

Brian had flung himself upon his bed, rolled in the damask curtain, like Henry Plantagenet, what time he went off into one of his fury-fits about Thomas Becket; and Mr. Jardine and Towler were able to talk confidentially at a respectful distance.

'Are you sure that he does not get brandy, without your knowledge?'

'No, sir,' said Towler; 'that is what I am not sure about. Its a puzzling case. He didn't ought to be so bad as he is after my care of him. There ought to be some improvement by this time; instead of which, it's all the other way.'

'What precautions have you taken?'

'I've searched his rooms, and not a thing have I found stowed away anywhere. It isn't often that he's left to himself, for when I get my mid-day sleep Mrs. Wendover sits with him; or, if he's cranky, and wants to be alone, she stays in the next room, with the door ajar between them; and Robert, the groom, is on duty in the

passage, in case the patient should get unmanageable.'

'I see—you have been very careful; but practically your patient has been often alone—the half-open door signifies nothing—he was unobserved, and free to do what he pleased, all the same.'

'But he couldn't drink if there was no liquour within reach.'

'Was there none? that is the question!' answered Mr. Jardine.'

'Look about the rooms yourself, sir, and see if he could hide anything, except in such places as I've overhauled every morning,' said Towler, with an offended air; and then, swelling with outraged dignity, he flung open doors of wardrobes and closets, pulled out drawers, and otherwise demonstrated the impossibility of anything remaining secret from his eagle eye.

'What about the next room?' asked Mr. Jardine, going into the adjoining room, which was Brian's study.

The room was littered with books and papers heaped untidily upon tables and chairs, and

even strewn upon the carpet. Brian had objected to any attempt at setting this apartment in order—the servants were to leave all books and papers untouched, on pain of his severe displeasure. Thus everything in the shape of litter had been allowed to accumulate, with its natural accompaniment, dust. Everyone knows the hideous confusion which the daily and weekly newspapers alone can make in a room if left unsorted and unarranged for a month or so; and mixed with these there were pamphlets, magazines, manuscripts, and piles of more solid literature in the shape of books brought up from the library for reference and consultation.

In one corner there were a pile of empty boxes, and on one of these Mr. Jardine's eye lighted instantly, on account of its resemblance to a wine merchant's case.

He pulled this box out from the others—a plain deal box, roughly finished, just the size of a two dozen case. One label had been pulled off, but there was a railway label which gave the date of delivery, just three weeks back.

'Have you any idea what this box contained?' inquired Mr. Jardine.

'No, sir. It was here when I came, just as you see it now.'

'It looks very like a wine merchant's box.'

'Well, it might be a wine-case, sir, as far as the look of it goes; but it might have held anything. It was empty when I came here, and there's no stowage for wine bottles in these rooms, as you have seen with your own eyes.'

'Don't be too sure of that; and now go back to your patient, and get him to eat some breakfast, if you can, while I go downstairs.'

'He can't eat, sir. It's pitiful; he don't eat enough for a robin. We try to keep up his strength with strong soups, and such like; but it's hard work to get him to swallow anything.'

Mr. Jardine went down to the family breakfast room, where his wife, Ida, and her stepmother were sitting at table, with pale perturbed faces, and very little inclination for that excellent fare which the Wimperfield housekeeper provided with a kind of automatic regularity, and would have continued

to provide on the eve of a deluge or an earthquake. He told Ida that all was going on quietly upstairs, and that he would share Towler's task as nurse all that day, so that she might be quite easy in her mind as to the patient. And then the servants came trooping in, as the clock struck nine, and they all knelt down, and John Jardine read the daily portion of prayer and praise.

It had been decreed by medical authority that on this day, provided the sky were propitious and the wind in a warm quarter, Vernon was to go out for his first drive. Mr. Jardine accordingly entreated that the three ladies would accompany him, and that Ida would have no fear as to her husband's welfare during her absence.

'I don't like to leave him,' she said, in confidence to Mr. Jardine, 'he seems so much worse this morning—wilder than I have ever seen him yet—and so white and haggard.'

'He is very bad, but your remaining indoors will do him no good. I will not leave him while you are away.'

Ida yielded. It was a relief to her to submit

to authority—to have some one able to tell her to do this or that. She felt utterly worn out in body and mind—all the energy, the calm strength of purpose, which had sustained her up to a certain point, was now exhausted. Despair had taken possession of her, and with despair came that dull apathy which is like death in life.

John Jardine took his wife aside before he went back to Brian's rooms.

'I want you to take care of Ida, to keep with her all day. She has been sorely tried, poor soul, and needs all your love.'

'She shall have it in full measure,' answered Bessie. 'How grave and anxious you look! Is Brian very ill?'

'Very ill.'

'Dangerously?'

'I am afraid so. I shall hear what Mr. Fosbroke says presently, and if his report be bad, I shall telegraph for the physician.'

'Poor Brian! How strangely he talked at dinner last night! Oh, John, I hardly dare say it—but—is he out of his mind?'

'Temporarily—but it is the delirium of a kind of brain fever, not madness.'

'And he will recover?'

'Please God; but he is very low. I am seriously alarmed about him.'

'Poor dear Brian!' sighed Bess. 'He was once my favourite cousin. But I must go back to Ida. You need not be afraid of my neglecting her. I shan't leave her all day.'

Mr. Jardine went to the housekeeper's room to make an inquiry. He wanted to know what that box from London had contained, a box delivered upon such and such a date.

The housekeeper's mind was dark, or worse than dark upon the subject—an obscurity enlightened by flashes of delusive light. Two housemaids, and an odd man who looked after the coal scuttles, were produced, and gave their evidence in a manner which would have laid them open to the charge of rank prevarication and perjury, as to the receipt of a certain wooden box, which at some stages of the inquiry became hopelessly entangled with a hamper from the Petersfield

fishmonger and a band-box from Lady Palliser's Brighton milliner.

'The carriage must have been paid,' said the housekeeper, 'that's the difficulty. If there'd been anything to pay, it would have been entered in my book; but when the carriage is paid, don't you see, sir, it's out of my jurisdiction, as you may say,' with conscious pride in a free use of the English language, 'and I may hear nothing about it.'

But now the odd man, after much thoughtful scratching of his head, was suddenly enlightened by a flash of memory from the paleozoic darkness of three weeks ago. He remembered a heavy wooden box that had come in his dinner-time —the fact of its coming at that eventful hour had evidently impressed him—and he had carried it up to Mr. Wendover's own sitting-room. It was very heavy, and Mr. Wendover had told him that it contained books.

'Did you open it for Mr. Wendover?'

'No sir. I offered to open it, but Mr. Wendover says he'd got the tools himself, and would

open it at his leisure. He had no call for the books yet awhile he says, and didn't want it opened.'

'I see, the box contained books. Thank you, that's all I wanted to know.'

John Jardine had very little doubt in his mind now as to the actual contents of the box. He had no doubt that Brian, finding himself refused drink, for which he suffered the drunkard's incessant craving, had contrived to get himself supplied from London; and that if the fire of his disease had known no abatement it was because the fuel that fed the flame had not been wanting.

The only question that remained to be answered was how Brian, carefully attended as he had been, had managed to dispose of his secret store of drink, under the very eyes, as it were, of his keeper. But Mr. Jardine knew that the sufferer from alcoholic poison is no less cunning than the absolute lunatic, and that falsehood, meanness, and fraud seem to be symptoms of the disease.

When he went back to Brian's rooms, he found the patient lying on his bed, exhausted by

the agitation and restlessness of the last few hours. He was not asleep, but was quieter than usual, in a semi-conscious state, muttering to himself now and then. Towler was sitting at a little table by the open window, breakfasting comfortably; his enjoyment of the coffee-pot, and a dish of ham and eggs, being in no manner lessened by the neighbourhood of the patient.

'Haven't been able to get him to take any nourishment,' whispered Towler, as Mr. Jardine came quietly into the room. 'He's uncommon bad.'

'Mr. Fosbroke will be here presently, I hope.'

'I don't think he'll be able to do much good when he does come,' said Towler; 'doctors ain't in it with a case of this kind. If he don't go off into a good sleep by-and-by, I'm afraid this will be a fatal case.'

Mr. Jardine made no reply to this discouraging observation. There are times when speech is worse than useless. He stood by the window, looking over at that shrunken figure on the great old fashioned four-post bed, with its

voluminous drab damask curtains, its cords, fringes, tassels, and useless decorations—the nerveless, helpless figure of wasted youth, the wreckage of an ill-spent life. The haggard countenance, damp with the dews of mental agony, and of a livid pallor, looked like the face of death. What could medicine do for this man beyond diagnosing his case, and giving an opinion about it, for the satisfaction—God save the mark!—of his friends? John Jardine knew in his heart that not all the doctors in Christendom could pick this shattered figure up again, and replace it in its former position among mankind.

Still intent upon solving that mystery about the contents of the wine case, Mr. Jardine's eyes wandered about the room, trying to discover some hiding-place which the careful Towler had overlooked. But so far he could see no such thing. There was the tall four-poster, with its square cornice, a ponderous mahogany frame with fluted damask stretched across it. Could Brian have hidden his brandy up yonder, behind the mahogany cornice? Surely not. First the damask

would have bulged with the weight of the bottles, and, secondly, the place was not accessible enough. He must have hidden his poison in some spot where he could apply himself to it furtively, hurriedly—twenty, fifty, a hundred times in the day or night.

Presently Mr. Jardine's glance fell on the half-open door of the bath room. It was a slip of a room cut off the study, a room that had been created within the last twenty years. It was the only room which Mr. Jardine had not inspected before he went down to breakfast.

He pushed open the door, and went in, followed by Towler, wiping the egginess and haminess from his mouth as he went.

'You kept your eye upon this room as well as the others, I suppose,' said Mr. Jardine, looking about him.

'Yes, sir, I have kept an eye upon everything.'

The apartment was not extensive. A large copper bath with a ponderous mahogany case, panelled, moulded, bevelled, the elaborate work-

manship of local cabinet-makers; a row of brass hooks hung with bath towels, which looked like surplices pendent in a vestry; a washstand in a corner, a dressing-table and glass, with its belongings, in the window, and a wicker arm-chair comprised the whole extent of furniture. No hiding-place here, one would suppose.

Mr. Jardine looked about the room thoughtfully. It was the one apartment in which the patient could hardly be intruded upon by his attendant. Here he could be sure of privacy.

'Did you examine the case of the bath,' he inquired presently, his mathematical eye quick to take in the difference between the inner shell of copper and the outer husk of mahogany.

'No, sir,' answered Towler, briskly. 'Is it 'oller?'

'Of course it's hollow. Surely your eye tells you that.'

'Yes, sir; but there's the hot water pipes inside —and there's no getting at it, except for a plumber.'

'Nonsense,' said Mr. Jardine, kneeling down at

one end of the bath, where there was a convenient mahogany door for the accommodation of the plumber, a door which lay somewhat in shadow, and had escaped Towler's observation.

'Bring me a candle,' said Mr. Jardine, unconsciously imitating the brotherhood of plumbers, whose consumption of candles is a household terror.

Towler returned to fetch a candle, while Mr. Jardine with cautious hand explored the cavern-like recesses between the bath and its outer shell, recesses in which lurked serpent-like convolutions of hot-water pipes and cold-water pipes, waste and overflow.

Yes, before Towler could arrive with the candle, he had fathomed the mystery. Three or four full bottles, and a large number of empties, were stowed away in this dusty receptacle. He drew one of the full bottles out into the light. 'Hennessy's fine old cognac,' said the label. This had been the secret source of fever and delirium —here had lurked the evil which had made all remedial measures vain.

Mr. Fosbroke was announced while John Jardine was washing the dust and the stains of rusty iron from his hands. Brian was in too low a condition to be rude to the country practitioner, much as he had protested against his interference. He suffered the apothecary to sit by his bed and feel his pulse, without a word of remonstrance.

'How do you find him?' asked Mr. Jardine, when Mr. Fosbroke had left the bedside.

'Very bad; pulse small and thready—a hundred and forty in the minute; violent throbbing in the temporal and carotid arteries; profuse perspiration—all bad signs. What medicines has he been taking?'

He was shown the prescriptions.

'Hum—hum—digitalis—bromide of potassium. I should like to inject chloral; but as the case is in Dr. Mallison's hands——'

'If you think there is danger I will telegraph for Mallison.'

'There is always danger in this stage of the malady, especially in the case of a patient of Mr. Wendover's age. The season, too, is unfavourable

—the mortality in this complaint is nearly double in summer. If we can get him into a sound sleep of some hours he may wake with a decided turn for the better—the delirium subjugated; but in his low state, even sleep may be fatal—there is so little vital power. Yes, I should certainly telegraph for Dr. Mallison; and in the meantime I'll try what can be done with chloral.'

'You must do the utmost you can. Mrs. Wendover has implicit faith in you.'

'I'll drive back and get the chloral.'

When the apothecary was gone, Mr. Jardine's first act was to telegraph to the London physician, his next, to put the unused bottles of cognac under lock and key, and, with Towler's help, to clear away the empty bottles without the knowledge of the servants. No doubt every member of the household knew the nature of Mr. Wendover's illness; but it was well to spare him the exposure of these degrading details.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOUSE IS HIS CASTLE.

IDA felt a strange relief to her spirits, despite the absolute blackness of her domestic horizon, when the carriage drove away from Wimperfield. She had left the house very seldom of late, feeling that duty chained her to the joyless scene of home; and there was an infinite relief in turning her back upon that stately white building in which was embodied all the misery of her blighted life. No charnel-house could be fuller of ghastly, unspeakable horrors than Wimperfield had become to her since that long, never-to-be-forgotten night when she had listened to her husband's ravings, and when all the loathsome objects his distracted fancy had conjured into being, and his never-resting tongue had described, had been only a little less real to her mind than they had been to his. Could she ever

again know peace and rest in those rooms; ever tread those corridors without shuddering and dread, ever know happiness again in all the days of her life? She leaned back in the carriage as they drove along the avenue, and rested with half-closed eyes, her soul heavy within her, her body weighed down by the soreness and weariness of her mind. If life could but end now! She felt that she could be of no more use in the world. She could do nothing to help her wretched husband. He had chosen to go his own way to destruction, and he was too near the edge of the pit now to be snatched back by any friendly hand. She felt that his fate had passed beyond the regions of hope. God might pity the self-destroyer, and deal lightly with him at the great audit; but on this earth there was no hope of cure. Brian Wendover was going down to the pit.

Bessie sat by Ida's side tenderly watching her worn white face, while Lady Palliser was entirely absorbed by the delight of administering fussily to her boy, who was well enough to laugh her shawls and comforters and motherly precautions

to scorn, and to jump about in the carriage, as at each break in the wood some new object of interest caught his eye—a rabbit, a squirrel, a hawk high up in the blue, invisible to any gaze less eager than his own. He was in wild spirits at being out of doors again, a restless eager soul, not to be restrained by any medical ordinances or maternal anxieties.

They went for a long drive, the horses, very fresh after the little exercise of the last month, devouring the ground under them—the summer breeze brisk and inspiring—the country beautiful beyond measure—an ever varying landscape of hill and wood and valley, green pastures and golden grain.

Bessie chatted gaily in her desire to distract Ida's mind, and the boy's vivacity never flagged; but Ida sat silent, feeling the blessedness of this brief respite from the horror of home, but quite unable to talk of indifferent subjects. She was haunted by the image of her husband as she had seen him that morning—his ashen countenance, the perpetual movement of his eyes, those nervous

attenuated hands, almost transparent in their bloodlessness, for ever pushing aside the formless horrors that crowded round him—pictures painted on the empty air, pictures for ever changing, yet hideously real to that disorganised brain, pictures that spoke and gibbered at him, shadows with which he carried on conversations.

With this awful image fresh in her mind, Ida could not even pretend to be cheerful, or interested in common things.

'Don't be unhappy about me, dear,' she said once when Bessie squeezed her hand, and looked at her with tender anxiety; 'I must bear my burden. Nobody can help me.'

'Except God,' whispered the Vicar's faithful wife. 'He lightens all burdens, in His good time.'

On the homeward road they wound near the base of Blackman's Hanger, and at this point Vernon got up and ordered the coachman to drive as near as he could to the old gamekeeper's cottage.

'We can walk the rest of the way,' said the boy.

'Walk!' shrieked Lady Palliser. 'Oh, Vernie,

what are you dreaming about? Mr. Fosbroke never said you might walk.'

'Very likely not,' retorted the boy, 'but you don't suppose I'm going to ask old Fosbroke's leave before I use my legs. Look here, mother dear: I'm as well as ever I was, and I'm not going to be mollicoddled any more.'

'But Vernie—'

I'm not going to be mollicoddled any more, and I'm going to see old Jack.'

'Nonsense, Vernie.'

'He came to see me, and I'm going to see him,' said Vernon resolutely. 'Remember what your favourite author, the Countess of Seven Stars, says about the necessity of returning a call—"and if the person calling happen to be your inferior in social status, the obligation to return the visit within a reasonable time will be so much the stronger." There, mother; there are the very words of your "Crême de la Crême" for you.'

'But, Vernon, the countess would never have imagined such a person as a Cheap Jack calling upon anyone for whom her book was intend ed.'

'The book was intended for a parcel of stuck-up cads,' said Vernon. 'Get on, Jackson.'

This to the coachman, who was driving slowly, perfectly conscious of the squabble going on behind him, and anticipating the reversal of Sir Vernon's order. But Lady Palliser said nothing, so Jackson quickened his pace a little, and drove along the rough winding road which skirted the base of the hill.

Directly he drew up his horses Vernon leapt out, and the three women followed him. After all, the mother inwardly argued, it were a pity to thwart her darling. He was in such high spirits, and seemed so thoroughly himself again. His very wilfulness was delightful, for it told of renewed vigour.

They all climbed the hill together, by a cork-screw track which was not too distressing. The atmosphere was cool and fresh at this altitude, the odour of the pines ambrosial.

'I suppose we had better wait a little way off, Vernie,' said Ida, when they were within a dozen yards of the hut. 'Your friend is so very uncivil to ladies.'

'Yes, you'd better rest yourselves on that fir tree,' answered Vernon, pointing to a prostrate giant of the grove which had been lately felled, 'while I run on and see him.'

They obeyed, but in less than five minutes Vernon came back.

'Jack is out, but his house is open,' he said eagerly, 'and I want you all to come and see it. I want you to see the house that my Jack built.'

'But would it be right to go into his cottage when he is away?' asked Ida.

'Of course it would,' cried her brother, dancing along before them. 'You must come—there's nothing to be ashamed of, I can tell you. Mother will see that my Jack isn't a vulgar person, that he can read and write, and has the ways of a gentleman.'

'I should certainly like to see what kind of person my son associates with,' said Lady Palliser, who, in common with the non-studious class of mankind, was a keen inquirer into the details of daily life.

She liked to know where her acquaintance

had their gowns made, and what wages they gave their cooks, and to be the first to hear of matrimonial engagements and dangerous illnesses.

The cottage door stood wide open, and as there was neither hall nor passage, the moment the three Fatimas had crossed the threshold they were standing in the innermost sanctuary of Mr. Cheap Jack's private life, and the character of the man stood revealed to them, so far as surroundings can reveal a man's character.

He was a smoker, for the room, albeit the lattice stood wide open, smelt strongly of tobacco, and over the narrow wooden mantel piece, were slung three pipes, one a long cherry-wood tube of decidedly Oriental appearance.

'Quite gentlemanly looking pipes,' said Lady Pallisea.

The room was in perfect order, everything arranged with an exquisite neatness. The floor was covered with a coarse, substantial matting, spotlessly clean. The furniture consisted of a clumsy old walnut wood table, evidently picked up at some farmhouse or cottage in the neigh-

bourhood, a heavy piece of cabinet work of the same order, half secretaire, half bookcase, a couple of substantial arm-chairs, and a ponderous old oak chest—also the relic of some dismantled homestead. There was a brass clock on the chimney piece, and there were a number of rather dingy-looking volumes in the bookcase, while the floor under the table was piled with quartos and thick octavos, which looked like books of reference. An old leathern despatch box, much the worse for wear, stood on the table. Ornaments, pictures, or photographs there were none.

'It really looks like a gentleman's room,' said Lady Palliser, after her eyes had devoured every detail.

'It *is* a gentleman's room,' answered Vernon, decisively. 'Didn't I tell you my friend Jack is a gentleman?'

'Vernie, dear, a man who goes about the country in a cart selling things, can't be a gentleman!' said his mother.

'I don't quite see that, Lady Palliser,' exclaimed Bessie, who was inspecting the book-

shelves. 'A gentleman may fall upon evil days, and have to earn his living somehow, don't you know; and why shouldn't he have a cart, and go about selling things? There's nothing disreputable in it, though he could hardly go into society, perhaps, while he was driving the cart, because the mass of mankind are such fools. Why shouldn't Vernie's instinct be right, and this Cheap Jack be a reduced gentleman? Froude says that in the colonies Oxford men may be seen mending the roads. Why shouldn't one man in the world have the courage to do humble work in his own country? This Jack is a University man.'

'How do you know that?' asked Lady Palliser, eagerly. She was ready to bow down before a University man as a necessarily superior being. There had never been such a person of her own blood.

'Here is a volume of Æschylus—the Clarendon Press—with his college arms. He is a Balliol man, the same college as my cousin Brian's.'

'That proves nothing,' said Lady Palliser,

contemptuously. 'He may have bought the book at a stall. All his furniture is second-hand, why not his books?'

'Oh, but here are more books with the Balliol arms—Pindar, Theocritus, Catullus, Horace, Virgil.'

'Can't you find his name in any of them?'

'No; that has been erased in some of the books, and has never been written in the others. Poor fellow! I daresay he would not like his real name to be known.'

'Didn't I tell you he was a gentleman, mother?' exclaimed Vernon, triumphantly.

Lady Palliser was almost convinced. The neat, substantially furnished room—so free from frippery or foppishness—the queer Oriental pipes—the well-used books in sober calf bindings, which had once been splendid—the college arms on almost every volume—these details impressed her in spite of herself.

'Poor young man! I should like to send him some money,' she said.

'He would not take it, he would scorn your money,' said Vernon. 'What does he want with

pounds, shillings, and pence? He told me that so long as he has his books to read, his pipe to smoke, and a fine country to roam about, he cares for nothing else. Your money wouldn't buy him anything.'

'You don't understand Vernie, dear. We might do something substantial for him—set him up in a nice little shop at Petersfield, perhaps a stationer's, or,' with a glance at the rack of pipes, 'a tobacconist's.'

'My Jack keeping a shop! my Jack behind a counter!' cried Vernon; 'if you knew anything about him you would never talk of such a thing. Why he likes to be as free as the birds of the air—to roam about all day—and sit up reading half the night.'

They were all clustered in front of the book-case, Bessie and Ida looking at the books, Lady Palliser and her boy intent on their own talk, when the door was flung open, and the master of the house suddenly appeared amidst them—a tall, broad shouldered figure, roughly clad in shooting jacket, corduroy, and leather, like a game-keeper

—a dark bearded face under a slouched hat. But the intruders had only the briefest time in which to observe his appearance. At sight of the group by the bookcase, Jack tilted his felt hat further over his brows, and strode across the room to that corner whence a corkscrew stair led to the upper story. He went up these stairs in three or four bounds, banged and bolted the door of the upper chamber; and his unbidden guests were left looking at each other in bewildered silence.

Lady Palliser, after a gasp or two, was the first to speak.

'Did you ever see such manners?' she exclaimed; 'such a perfect brute? Vernie, you must never speak to that horrid creature again. I never want to have anything more to do with University men if this is a specimen of their manners! Never so much as to take off his hat to us!'

'We had no right to come crowding into his room,' said Bessie, who could seldom find it in her heart to be angry with anyone. 'I daresay the poor thing feels the change in his position. When Brian, of the Abbey, comes home—if ever

he does come home—I'll ask him to hunt this poor fellow out, and help him in some way. One Balliol man ought to help another.'

'Let us go back to the carriage instantly,' said Lady Palliser, almost shouting the substantive, in order that Jack might be reminded what kind of people he had insulted by his ruffianly bearing. 'I feel that I am bemeaning myself every moment I stay in this house.'

They hurried down the sandy hill path to the road where they had left the carriage, and Lady Palliser hustled them into it, breathless, with the combined effect of the rapid descent and her indignation.

'Why, Ida, how deadly pale you are,' exclaimed Bessie. 'I hope you are not ill. Have we walked too fast for you.'

'No, dear—only—that man's face reminded me——'

'Of Brian's when he first came home from Norway, and was so dreadfully sunburnt?' said Bessie, 'so it did me. The idea flashed upon me, as the rude wretch rushed past us, that he had

a sort of look of Brian. Just the way he carried his head, you know, and something in the shape of his shoulders—not a real resemblance.'

'Of course not.'

CHAPTER VIII.

'AS ONE DEAD IN THE BOTTOM OF A TOMB.'

Dr. Mallison came to Wimperfield at the same hour as on the occasion of his first visit. He was with the patient for nearly half-an-hour, and he confabulated with Mr. Fosbroke for at least another half hour, so it could not be said that he performed the physician's duty in a careless or perfunctory manner. But his opinion was not hopeful; and there was a gravity in his manner when he talked to Ida and her step-mother which was evidently intended to prepare them for the worst. He gave a peremptory order for a second nurse, an able-bodied experienced woman, who could relieve Towler in his now most onerous duties—duties growing hourly more painful, since the last development of the patient's delirium was a violent hatred of his attendant, who, as he

believed, was always lying in wait to do him some injury. Dr. Mallison also advised that Mrs. Wendover should no longer occupy the bedroom adjoining her husband's. Upon this point he was very firm, when Ida urged her anxiety to forego no duty which she owed to her husband.

'I am so sorry for him,' she said. 'I would do anything in the world to help or to comfort him.'

'Unhappily, dear madam, you can do neither. When these paroxysms are upon him he will mistake his best friend for his worst enemy—he was quite violent to Towler just now. You can do absolutely nothing, and your presence is even likely to irritate him. He must be given over entirely to his nurses. Towler will obey my directions implicitly, and the female attendant—Mr. Fosbroke tells me he can find a thoroughly competent person—will assist him in carrying them out. If we can stimulate the patient's vital power, which is just now at the lowest ebb, and if we can induce natural sleep, why, there may still be a favourable result. But I do not conceal from you that Mr. Wendover's condition is critical,

very critical. Lady Palliser, you will insist, I hope that your daughter removes to an apartment at some distance from her husband's for the present. A few days hence, when the delirium is subjugated, as I trust it may be, by—ahem—the removal of the exciting cause, Mrs. Wendover may resume her attendance upon her husband. Just at present the less she sees of him the better for both.'

Ida could not disobey this injunction, especially as Lady Palliser and Mrs. Jardine took the matter into their own hands. Jane Dyson was ordered to convey all Mrs. Wendover's belongings to a room on the second and topmost floor of the mansion, exactly over that she now occupied—a fine airy apartment, with a magnificent view, but less lofty, and less ponderously furnished than the apartments of the first floor. Bessie vowed that this upper chamber, with its French bedstead, and light chintz draperies, and maple furniture, was a much prettier room than the one below. She ran up and down stairs carrying flowers, Japanese fans, tea-tables, and other frivolities, until she made

the new room a perfect bower, and then carried Ida off triumphantly to inspect her new quarters.

'Isn't it lovely,' she said, 'such a nice change? Do let us have our tea up here, if that good Dyson won't mind bringing it. Nearly six o'clock, and we haven't had a cup of tea! I do so enjoy thoroughly new surroundings. We'll have the table just here, in front of this window. What a sweet architect to give this room windows down to the ground, and a lovely balcony! You must have some large Japanese vases in the balcony, Ida. That lovely deep red—or orange tawny. Oh, you poor pet, how wretched you look!'

'I have just been talking to the new nurse, Bessie. She seems a good, honest creature. She has nursed other people in the same complaint, and—and—she thinks Brian is desperately ill.'

'Oh, but he may get over it, dear! The London doctor did not give him up; and there is no good in your making yourself ill with worry and fear. If you do, you won't be able to wait upon Brian when he begins to get better; and convalescents want so much attention, don't you know.'

The tea came, and Bessie persuaded her friend to take some, prattling on all the time in the hope of diverting Ida from the silent contemplation of her trouble. But the horror of the case had taken too stern a hold upon Ida's brain. It was the dominant idea; as with the somnambulist whose perceptions are dead to every other subject save the one absorbing thought, and all subsidiary ideas linked with it by the subtle chain of association. Ida smiled a wan smile, and pretended to be interested in Bessie's parochial anecdotes—the idiosyncrasies of the new curate, the fatuity of every young woman in the parish in running after him.

'He is such a perfect stick; but then certainly there is no other single man in the parish, under forty. He is like Robinson Crusoe. It is an awfully deceptive position for a young man to occupy. I know he is beginning to think himself quite handsome, while as for pimples—well, his face is like a Wiltshire meadow before it has been bush-harrowed.'

Ida did not go down to dinner that evening.

She felt utterly unequal to the effort of pretended cheerfulness, and she did not want to inflict a countenance of stony gloom upon Mr. and Mrs. Jardine, or on Vernie, who was going to dine late for the first time since his illness. So she sat by the open window overlooking the woods, grey in the universal twilight greyness, and she read Victor Cousin's 'History of Philosophy,' which was a great deal more comforting than fiction or poetry would have been, as it carried her into regions of abstract thought where human troubles entered not.

For the next three days things went on quietly enough. Brian never left his own apartments, now an ample range, since Ida's bedroom had been thrown into the suite, so as to give him space and verge enough for his roaming when the restless fit was on him: and alas! how seldom did he cease from his restlessness. He now saw scarcely anyone but his nurses and Mr. Fosbroke, who called three times a day, and was altogether devoted in his watchfulness of the case.

Ida had not ceased from visiting the invalid until

it became too obvious that her presence was irritating to him. He recalled the most painful scenes of their past experience, raved about his marriage, and accused his wife of cruelty and greed of wealth, wept, stormed, blasphemed, until Ida rushed shuddering from the room. To the nurses this wild talk was only part and parcel of the patients' hallucinations—to Ida it was too real.

Mr. Jardine and his wife stayed till the end of the week, but on Saturday the Vicar was compelled to go back to his parishioners; and although Bessie wanted to remain at Wimperfield, separating herself from her husband for the first time in her wedded life, Ida would not consent to such a sacrifice. Vernon, who was pronounced thoroughly convalescent, was to go back to Salisbury Plain with the Jardines, everybody being agreed that Wimperfield Park was no place for him under existing circumstances. If Brian's malady were doomed to end fatally, it was well that the boy should be gone before the dreaded guest crossed the threshold.

Ida saw her friends depart with a sense of

despair too deep for words. She hugged Vernie with the passionate fervour of one who never hoped to see him more. She felt as if it were she whose hours were numbered, she for whom the thin thread of life was gradually dwindling to nothingness. The very atmosphere was charged with the odour of death. The light was shadowed by the gloom of the grave. Again and again in troubled dreams she had recalled that dreadful scene in the church with Brian; and she had seen the worms crawling out through the mouldering timbers of the church-floor —she had smelt the sickening taint of corruption.

She stood in the portico in the early summer morning, watching Mr. Jardine's phaeton dwindle to a speck in the distance of the avenue, and then she went slowly back to the house, feeling as if she were quite alone in her misery. It was not that Fanny Palliser was wanting in kindness or sympathy, but she was wanting in comprehension of Ida's feelings, and the stronger nature could not lean upon the weaker; and then the mother would be absorbed in her grief at the loss of her boy, who had become doubly precious

since his illness. No, Ida felt that now John Jardine was gone she must bear her burden alone. Help for her, strength outside her own courageous nature, there was none.

She longed on this exquisite morning to be roaming about the park and woods, or riding far afield; but she had made up her mind that, so long as her husband remained in his present critical condition, it was her duty to stay close at hand, within call; lest at any moment there might be a return to reason, and she might again have power to soothe and support him, as she had done many a time in the long downhill progress of his malady.

With this idea she spent the greater part of her day in the bedroom which Bessie had made so bright and so comfortable. Here she was within easy reach of the nurse in the rooms below, and could be summoned to her husband without a minute's delay. Here she had her favourite books, and the view of park and woods in all their summer glory. She could sit out in her balcony, reading, or looking idly at the

wide expanse of hill and valley, brooding sadly over days that were gone, full of fear for the immediate present, and not daring to face the dreaded future.

'Don't think me unsociable,' she said to Lady Palliser, before going back to her room after a hasty breakfast; 'but I am too completely miserable to put on the faintest show of cheerfulness, and I should only make you wretched if I were with you. Go out for a drive, and pay a few visits, mamma. You have had a trying time, and you must want a little change of scene.'

'I believe I do, Ida,' replied Lady Palliser, gravely. 'I feel that I am below par, and that I really want sea air. What should you think of our going to Bournemouth directly after the funeral?'

'The funeral,' murmured Ida, pale as death.

'Yes, dear. Mr Fosbroke has quite given up all hope, I know; and after the funeral you will want a change as badly as I do. I thought it would be as well to write to the Bournemouth agent to secure nice apartments, for I shouldn't care about staying at an hotel.'

'Oh, mamma, don't make your plans so much beforehand! Wait till he is dead,' said Ida, bitterly.

There seemed to her something ghoulish and stony-hearted in this prevision of coming doom, this arrangement for making the best of life and being comfortable when the sufferer upstairs should have ceased from the struggle with man's last foe.

Lady Palliser contrived to get on without her step-daughter's society. She had Jane Dyson, who was a person of considerable conversational powers, and who had an inexhaustible well-spring of interesting discourse in her recollections of the Archbishop's wife's lingering illness. The mistress and maid spent the morning not unpleasantly in conversation of the charnel-house order, and in looking over Lady Palliser's wardrobe, with a view to discovering what new mourning she would require in the event of Brian's death. She had liked him, and had been kind to him in life, and she was not going to stint him in death by any false economy in crape or bugles.

CHAPTER IX.

A FIERY DAWN.

The Jardines had been gone three days, and there was no change either for good or evil in Brian's condition. Mr. Fosbroke admitted that he was as ill as he could possibly be—the malady must either take a turn for the better, or end fatally within a day or two. The servants all talked of the impending funeral as complacently as Lady Palliser. The event must happen; and it would be as well to make the best of it. They had not yet gone out of mourning for Sir Reginald; and here was another death at hand to start them again with new suits of black. This was one of the advantages of service in a really good family, where the King of Terrors was treated with proper distinction.

It was eleven o'clock at night, and the house was hushed in silence—save in that suite of rooms where the invalid and his nurses were hardly ever at rest. One of the men servants slept in his clothes on a truckle bed in the corridor, ready for service in any emergency. Every one else had gone to bed, except Ida, who sat at her window, looking out at the wild windy sky and the forest trees swaying in the gale.

The day had been rainy and tempestuous, and the wind was still raging—just such a wind as Ida remembered upon Bessie's birthday, the day of that terrible storm which had cost so many lives, and had made Reginald Palliser master of Wimperfield.

She sat gazing idly at the sky, in sheer despondency and weariness. Her devotional books, which had been her chief comfort in these dark days and nights, lay unopened on her table. The effort to read any other kind of literature had been abandoned for the last day or two. Her mind refused to understand the words which her eyes mechanically perused. She could only read such books

as spoke of comfort to a weary soul, of hope beyond a sinful world.

She had eaten hardly anything for the last few days, living on cups of tea, and semi-transparent slices of bread and butter. Her nights had been almost sleepless, her brief snatches of slumber disturbed by hideous dreams. She was thoroughly worn out in body and mind, and as she sat by the open window, loosely dressed in a tea-gown, with a china-crape shawl wrapped round her shoulders, the monotonous moaning of the wind in the elms had a soothing sound, like a lullaby, and hushed her to sleep. She lay back in her low luxurious chair, with her head half buried in the comfortable down pillow, and slept as she had not slept for a month. It was the slumber of sheer exhaustion, deep and sweet, and long—very long; for when she opened her eyes and looked about her, awakened by a strange oppression of the chest, there was the livid light of earliest dawn in the room—a light that changed all at once to a bright red glow, vivid as the sky at sundown.

The oppression of her breath increased, she felt suffocated. The livid dawn, the crimson sunset, changed to grey; the atmosphere around her grew thick; there was a smarting sensation in her eyes, a stifling sensation in her throat. Mechanically, not knowing what she did, she began to grope her way to the door. But in that thickening atmosphere she did not know which was the door—her outspread arms clasped some heavy piece of furniture—the wardrobe. She leaned against it exhausted, helpless, stupified by that horrible smoke; and as she leaned there a wild shrill shriek pealed out from below—the cry of 'Fire!' Again and again that dreadful cry resounded, in a woman's piercing treble. Then came a hubbub of other voices—without, within—she could not tell where, or how near, or how far—but all the sounds seemed distant.

She could just see the open window by which she had been sleeping a few minutes ago—she could distinguish it by the red light outside, which was just visible through the dense smoke within, momently thickening.

She made for the window - anything to escape from that suffocating atmosphere; but just as she was approaching that red patch of light shining amidst the blackness, a sudden tongue of flame shot up from below, caught the light chintz drapery, and in an instant the window was framed in fire. The flame ran from one curtain to another, fanned by the wind which was still blowing—valence, draperies, all the ornamentation of the three windows were in a blaze. Ida stood helpness, motionless as Lot's wife, confronting the flames. To rush through them, to leap through the open window although it were to certain death, was her first impulse. Any death must be better than to fall down suffocated on the floor, and to be burned alive.

Then came the thought of her husband — so weak, and mad, and helpless—of her step-mother. Were they, too, in danger of instant death? Or was she on this upper floor the only victim?

The thin chintz curtains flamed and blazed into nothingness while she was looking at them. The wood-work round the windows crackled and

blistered, but the flame died out into ashes. Only the intolerable smoke remained, and the ever-increasing glow of the fire below, more vivid with every moment. She made one mad rush for the balcony. Great Heaven, what a scene greeted her eyes as she looked downwards! Masses of flame, mingled with black smoke clouds, were being vomited out of the lower windows. There was a little crowd of men below—gardeners, stablemen, who lived close at hand. Some of these were making feeble efforts with garden engines, sending out little jets of water which seemed only to feed the flames, as if the water had been oil, while others were trying to adjust a fire-escape, deposited in the stables years ago, in the reign of Sir Reginald's father, and out of working-order from long disuse. Three or four grooms were rushing to and fro with buckets, and splashing water against the stone walls, with an utter absence of any effect whatever.

Ida stood in the balcony, leaning against the iron-work, waiting for rescue or death. The atmosphere was a little less stifling here, but

every now and then a dense cloud of smoke rolled over her, and almost suffocated her before the wind drove it upward. The sky was alight with reflected fire. The burning pyre of Dido or Sardanapalus could hardly have made a grander effect—and far away in the east, against the dark undulations of wooded hills, there was another light—the tender roseate flush of summer dawn, full of promise and peace.

Ida stood with clasped hands, and lips moving dumbly in prayer. She gave her soul back to her Creator; she prayed for pardon for her sins; she closed her eyes waiting meekly for death.

Suddenly, as she prayed, full of resignation, the balcony creaked under a footstep—a strong arm was wound round her waist—she was lifted bodily over the iron rail and carried carefully, firmly, easily down, a ladder, amidst a shout of rapture from the little crowd below.

Every Englishman is not heroic, but every Englishman knows how to admire heroism in his fellow-man.

Before the bearer of his burden reached the

lowest rung of the ladder, Ida was unconscious. She lay lifeless and helpless in her preserver's arms. When they were on the solid ground, he bent his bare head over hers, which rested on his shoulder, and kissed her on the forehead.

The crowd saw and did not condemn the action.

'It might be a liberty,' said the head gardener, 'but he'd earned the right to do it. None of us could have done what he did.'

When Ida awakened to consciousness she was lying in the lodge-keeper's little bedroom at the Park gates, and her step-mother was seated at the bed-side ready to offer her the usual remedy for all feminine woes—a cup of tea.

'Thank God, you are safe!' said Ida, the memory of that terrible dawn quickly recurring to her mind, a little bewildered at the first moment by her strange surroundings. 'Where is Brian?'

Fanny Palliser burst into tears.

'Oh, Ida, it was Brian set the house on fire, in one of his mad fits—hunting for some horrible thing behind his bed-curtains; and poor Towler

and the nurse were both asleep when it happened —at least, Towler, who was sitting up with him had fallen into a dose, and heard Brian talk about looking for serpents in the curtains, and then about flames and fire—but didn't take any notice, or so much as open his eyes—for his talk had been so often of fire and flames—poor creature!—and when he woke the whole room was in a blaze, and the fire had spread through the open door to the window curtains in the next room. Towler and the nurse, and Rogers, all did their uttermost, and risked their lives trying to get Brian away; but he wouldn't leave the burning rooms. He got wilder and wilder; and then, just as they were calling a couple of the stablemen to help them, meaning to get him away by main force, he rushed to the window and threw himself out.'

'And he was killed!' cried Ida.

'Yes; the shock killed him. But you know, dear, there's no use in fretting. Mr. Fosbroke says that he could not have lived till the end of the week. His constitution was quite gone. It was a happy release.'

'Not such a death,' murmured Ida, tears streaming down her wan cheeks; 'such a death could not be a happy release.'

Lady Palliser shook her head, and sighed plaintively. Perhaps she had been inclined to take the survivor's view of the question. Euthanasia to Fanny Palliser's mind meant a death which relieves the family of the deceased from the burden of a long illness.

'He did not suffer at all, dearest,' she said soothingly. 'Mr. Fosbroke said the shock killed him. There were no bones broken. He fell on the grass in front of the library windows. And oh, Ida, what a blessing that everything at Wimperfield is fully insured! The house is completely gutted!'

Ida could not feel sorry about Wimperfield. The place had been to her of late the abode of horror. If she could be glad of anything in her present frame of mind, it would have been to know that Wimperfield House was razed to the ground.

'The portico and the walls are standing,' pur-

sued Lady Palliser; 'and no doubt a clever architect will be able to build the house up again in the old style.'

'But, mamma, it was an ugly, uninteresting house—not a hundred years old.'

'Exactly so. If it had been really an old house, one would be glad to get rid of it; but it was all as good as new, and so thoroughly substantial! and how you can call it ugly, with such a portico, I can't imagine. I wonder you have not more classical taste. I love anything Grecian. The only thing I ever felt proud of at Les Fontaines was the plaster urns with scarlet geraniums in them!'

'Mamma, how was I saved? Who was it saved me?' asked Ida, presently, when she had taken her cup of tea, and the Swiss clock over the chimney-piece had struck nine.

The sun was shining through the open lattice and upon the roses and the lilies in the little lodge garden. Everything wore a glad and cheerful aspect in the summer morning.

'Ah, my dear, that *is* a story'' exclaimed

Lady Palliser, nodding her head with intense significance, and pleased at being able to divert Ida's thoughts from her husband's miserable end; 'I never did! You will be surprised! Oh, my dear, I thought it was all over with you! All the gardeners and stablemen were there — and Rogers — and John and William — and Henry —half dressed and in slippers, poor creatures; and I begged and implored of them to save you—to get to your room somehow—inside or out. But the staircase to the second floor was choked with smoke and flame, and falling timbers; one of the men tried to go up, but he came back and said he must wait for the firemen—nobody but a fireman could do it. And then they got ladders, but the first ladder wasn't long enough, and nobody seemed to be in their proper senses. Thomas rode off to Petersfield for the engine directly the fire broke out, but that's eight miles off, as you know, and it all seemed hopeless. I was running about among them all like a mad woman, in my dressing-gown and slippers; and as for Jane Dyson, she sat

on the lowest step of the portico, and went out of one fit of hysterics into another, just as she did when the Archbishop's wife died; and I thought all hope was over, when a man rushed in among us, snatched the longest ladder from the men who were bringing it from the walled garden, and put it up against the balcony. He went up it just like a sailor, and before I could hardly breathe he was coming down again with you in his arms, safe and sound. And who do you think the man was?'

'The fire-brigade man, I suppose.'

'Not a bit of it. The man who saved you was Vernie's friend, Cheap Jack.'

CHAPTER X.

'SOLE PARTNER AND SOLE PART OF ALL THESE JOYS.'

More than a year had gone by since that awful night, and a new Wimperfield House was slowly rising from the ashes of the Bath stone mansion with the Grecian portico. Only the walls and the portico had remained intact after the fire, and these had been pulled down to make room for a spacious edifice in the early English manner, the heavy insurances on the old building providing for the cost of this newer and more beautiful Wimperfield. But Ida was not near to watch the new Wimperfield in the progress of erection. She had spent the greater part of the last year at The Homestead with Miss Wendover, and the residue with her stepmother at Bournemouth, where Lady Palliser had taken and furnished for herself one of the

pretty villas on the Boscomb estate, a pleasant home for the placid joys of widowhood, and a nice place for Vernon's holidays, were he contented to spend them there, which he was not, greatly preferring the more rustic life of Kingthorpe. Here he was a welcome guest both at The Knoll and at The Homestead; while there was a third house open to him within a walk of the village, for Mr. Wendover had returned from his distant wanderings, and he and Vernie were on very friendly terms.

Ida had as yet seen but little of the master of the Abbey, albeit she heard of him almost daily from some of The Knoll family. He had returned at Easter, unexpectedly, as usual, and much to the surprise of a neighbourhood which had grown accustomed to the idea of his never coming back at all. But although he had settled himself at the Abbey, declaring that he had made an end of his wanderings, seen all he wanted to see, and never meant to go far afield any more, he had taken no share in the picnics and rustic festivities with which The Knoll family

celebrated their worship of the gread god Pan; whereupon Blanche informed her cousin frankly that he was not half so nice as he had been seven years ago, when he had joined in their fungus hunts and barrow hunts, and blackberry gatherings, just as if he had been one of themselves.

'Seven years ago I was seven years younger, Blanche. We were all children then.'

Blanche sighed, and shook her head despondently.

'As for me, I feel centuries old,' she said; 'but that is only natural in such a dead-and-alive hole as Kingthorpe.'

Which speech, being interpreted, meant that Miss Wendover had not had a new frock or an invitation to a garden party for the last fortnight.

'Still,' she argued, 'one ought to make the best of one's life even at Kingthorpe, and picnics and rambles help one to endure existence. You used to be such a delightful companion, and now no one but little Vernie ever seems to get any

fun out of you. He is always talking of the larks he has at the Abbey.'

'Sir Vernon is good enough to call the mildest form of diversion a lark!' said Brian Wendover, smiling at her.

'Come now, I will make a bargain with you,' said Blanche. 'John Jardine and Bess are coming over next week to spend Bessie's birthday with us, which, as you know, is a family festival that we never allow to be celebrated anywhere else. Bess and John and the babies are coming to us, and Vernon Palliser is going to The Homestead, and his mother is coming over from Bournemouth to stay a few days with Aunt Betsy; so you see it will be a grand family gathering of Wendovers and Pallisers. Now, if you are anything like the man you were seven years ago, prove it by joining us on this occasion.'

'I cannot refuse; and I will try my uttermost to forget that I have lived seven lonely years since that happy summer.'

'Ah it was a happy summer!' sighed Blanche,

who affected to be weighed down by the burden of mature years. 'I wasn't *out* in those days, and I hadn't a care.'

'What form does your festival take this year? and where do you mean to celebrate it?'

'Oh, a picnic, of course, if this lovely weather only holds out. We have not had one really proper picnic this year.'

'But don't you think the seventh of September is just a little late for an *al fresco* feast? Suppose we were to make it luncheon and afternoon tea at the Abbey, with unlimited tennis in the afternoon.'

'That would be simply delicious,' said Blanche, concluding that Mr. Wendover intended to invite all the eligible young men of his acquaintance to be found within twenty miles.

'Then it is agreed. You need give yourself no further trouble. You have only to bring your people—the Knoll party, and the Homestead party.'

'Precisely. Of course *you* can ask as many as you like.'

The year which was gone had been one of perfect peace for Ida, peace overshadowed by the memories of pain and horror; but those memories had been lightened, and her mind had been comforted, and soothed, and fortified by Aunt Betsy's loving companionship, by that common sense and broad way of thinking which was as a tower of strength in the day of trouble. Yet for months after that awful time at Wimperfield her nights had been broken by dreadful dreams or too vivid reminiscences of her husband's evil fate, that terrible decay of mind and body, that gradual annihilation of the energies and powers of manhood which it had been her painful lot to witness.

Aunt Betsy took care that the young widow's days should be too busy for much thought. She found constant occupation for her. She sent her about to the remotest corners of the parish to minister to the sorrows of others; she gave her the sick to nurse, and the old and feeble to care for, and the young to teach; so that there should be no leisure left from dawn to sunset for futile

lamenting over the irrevocable past. But in the silence of night those dreaded memories crept out of their hiding-places, as other vermin creep out of their holes under cover of darkness, and it was long before they began to grow less vivid and less terrible.

From the moment Miss Wendover appeared at Wimperfield on the afternoon after the fire, coming as quickly after the receipt of the news as horses could convey her, Ida had been sheltered and protected by her love. No sooner was Brian laid at rest in his grave in Wimperfield churchyard than Aunt Betsy carried off the hopeless, broken-down widow to the Homestead, where Ida resumed all her old duties; so that there were times when it seemed as if all the years of her married life were but a dream from which she had awakened, a dream which had subdued and saddened her whole nature, and had made her feel old and weary.

But there was much of happiness in her life, so much that she was fain to put aside all signs and tokens of grief except her dense black gowns and

crape bonnets, and to rejoice with those who rejoiced; for here was Aunt Betsy, the most cheery and unselfish of women, whose life ought to be all sunshine, inasmuch as she spent so large a portion of it in brightening the lives of others; and here were the boys and girls from The Knoll, always in uproarious spirits, and wanting Ida's sympathy in all their delights; and here was Vernon coming over from the Vicarage on Salisbury Plain, at all times and seasons, for a few days' holiday, rosier and stronger and more sporting every time she saw him, great upon hawking and hunting, and full of grand schemes for his future life at the new Wimperfield. He had forgotten Brian's melancholy doom, as easily as youth is apt to forget everything, in the hurry and ardour of life's morning; but his love for his sister knew no abatement. He wanted her to share in all his future joys.

'You are not going to stay at The Homestead all your life, are you?' he asked one day. 'Of course you are going back to Wimperfield directly the new house is finished?'

'No, dear, I could never live at Wimperfield

again,— it would recall too many sad scenes. When Aunt Betsy is tired of me I shall go abroad. I have seen so little of the world, you know.'

'Oh, if you want to travel, you can go with me when I come of age; but in the meantime you must help mother to keep house at Wimperfield. It will be quite a new place—everything new—nothing to remind you of father or Brian. And then in a few years I shall be of age, and then we can go off to the Rockies together.'

'With Cheap Jack for our guide, philosopher and friend,' said Ida.

'Well, no; I'm afraid Cheap Jack won't go with us!' answered Vernon, laughing.

'I have such reason to be grateful to him that I could hardly object to his company,' said Ida; 'and I am quite unhappy at never having been able to thank him or reward him for saving my life.'

'He didn't want to be thanked or rewarded. Didn't I tell you that he was not that kind of man?'

'But why should any man go through life doing good to others, and never getting thanks or praise for his goodness,' said Ida. 'It is a most unpleasant form of misanthropy. I feel quite uncomfortable under the burden of my obligations to Mr. Jack; and though I have made every effort to put myself in communication with him, through Mr. Mason and others, I have not been able to find out where he is or anything about him.'

'Odd, isn't it?' said Vernon. 'He left the cottage on the day after the fire, didn't he? shut it up, and took the key to Lord Pontifex's steward, and drove off with his books and things packed in his cart, goodness knows where, after having made a free gift of his stock to the villagers.'

'Not a very profitable way of carrying on business,' said Ida. 'He must have had means independent of his trade.'

'Well, I don't suppose we shall ever see him again,' returned Vernon, cheerfully, somewhat to Ida's disgust, for this indifference to the sudden close

of a once enthusiastic friendship argued a lightness and fickleness of disposition in Sir Vernon Palliser.

And now it was again the eve of Bessie's birthday, that day which had twice been fraught with fatal influences for Bessie's friend; and Ida could not put away the feeling that this seventh of September, finding her once again on the scene of past fatalities, must needs bring her some new evil, some undreamed-of crisis in her life. Yet what would happen to her now? she asked herself. The play was played out. She had lived her life. For her tragedy and comedy were alike over and done with.

The morning of the seventh dawned fair and bright. If there were any omen in those pinky clouds which flecked the tender gray of early morning, surely it must be a portent of good and not of evil; although Lady Palliser, who was not given to over-cheerful views, declared at breakfast that such roseate hues in early morning meant bad weather before noon.

'Let the weather be never so unkind, we'll find a way of enjoying ourselves at the Abbey,' said Aunt Betsy, who was in tremendous spirits, 'won't we, Vernie?'

'Of course,' answered Vernon. 'Mother has a new bonnet, and is afraid of getting it spoiled. The weather won't interfere with us. We can play hide and seek in the Abbey cellars.'

'Oh, Vernie! and get shut behind a secret panel or in a chest, like that poor girl in the poem Ida used to read to us.'

'Don't be afraid, mother. If I get into a chest, you may depend I shall know how to get out of it. That girl in the poem was a duffer for not having made more row; and her lover was a beastly sneak for not ferreting out her hiding-place.'

'They ought to have had a detective down from London,' remarked Lady Palliser, ignoring both the scene and the date of the story.

Her reading had lain much among novels in which the private detective was omnipotent, the unraveller of all mysteries, the avenger of every wrong

Miss Wendover drove Lady Palliser to the Abbey in her phaeton, and the party from The Knoll went in the roomy family waggonette; but Vernon and his sister walked across the fields and the common, by that path which Ida had trodden on the day she first saw the master of the Abbey. How vividly she recalled her feelings on that day—the pain and embarrassment she felt in Brian Wendover's presence, the agony of humiliation! And then had followed the too happy, too perilous days in which he had been her familiar friend, the fatal night on which he had declared himself her lover.

Well, she was free now. She could meet him and think of him without sin; but since his return she had met him at most half a dozen times, and then always in the company of other people. He had greeted her cordially, as friend should greet friend, but he had not sought her society. He knew that she was living in his aunt's house, but he had only been to that house once since his return.

'Time was, time is, time's past,' said the

brazen oracle. Ida began to tell herself that for her time was verily past. Life, and youth, and love had been her's; but fate had been adverse, and she had wasted them, and they were over and gone.

She had some time for pensive reverie, as she walked to the Abbey, Vernon being as usual more occupied by the inhabitants of the hedges and ditches than by his companion; but once arrived at the Abbey, there was no time for sadness. Bessie was on the threshold to welcome her, and the whole Knoll family were swarming in the great hall, where Brian, standing under the picture of the famous Sir Tristram, was giving cordial welcome to everyone.

How handsome he looked under the likeness of his ancestor! and how vividly the modern face recalled the ancestral lineaments! Time had only deepened the noble lines of his countenance, and added dignity to his figure and bearing. He looked happy, too, like a man upon whom the future smiles assuringly. The fancy flashed across Ida's mind that he was engaged to be

married, and that he meant to announce the fact to his family to-day, perhaps, and to introduce the lady. She looked hastily round the hall, almost expecting to see some new face, young, lovely, beaming with smiles—the face of the chosen one. But there was no one except Lady Palliser and the house of Wendover.

'I have not asked any strangers, Blanche,' said Brian. 'I thought we should all have more fun if we had the old place to ourselves.'

'How good of you!' replied the matronly Bess. 'I'm sure we shall all enjoy ourselves ever so much more.'

Blanche was disappointed. Lawn tennis among relations was all very well, but she had plenty of that at The Knoll. She felt sorry she had put on her best hat and Indian silk frock, elaborately frilled with twine-coloured lace. A cotton gown, and the oldest thing in garden hats, would have been good enough for such an assembly.

The Colonel and Mrs. Wendover had driven over with their children. It was quite a family party—Bessie's babies, a girl able to toddle, and

a boy in the nurse's arms, were the great features of the entertainment, the grandmother openly worshipping them, the grandfather condescending to occasional patronage of this third generation, but evidently anxious to dissemble his pride.

'Bessie makes such a preposterous fuss about her babies,' said Blanche, after declining lawn-tennis with Eva and her two brothers. 'I hope if ever I am deluded into marrying, I shall not degenerate into an upper nurse.'

The Abbey had been swept and garnished in honour of the occasion, every room brightened with flowers—even that sacred apartment, Brian's study, thrown open to the public. After luncheon it happened somehow—Ida could hardly have explained how—that she and Brian were alone together in this very room, the afternoon sunlight shining on them—for in spite of Lady Palliser's prophecy the day had been lovely—the scent of stocks and mignonette and sweet peas blowing in upon them from the old-fashioned garden at the back of the Abbey. They had strayed to this spot with the others; and the

others had strayed off and left them, Ida looking absently at the backs of the Greek dramatists, Brian looking intently at her.

'I don't think you have been in this house since the day we first met in the hall below?' he said, interrogatively.

'No, I have never been here since.'

'And yet you were once fond of the Abbey. You used to like wandering about the old house and gardens. You would sit reading in the library. The housekeeper has often talked to me about you.'

She stood before him with lowered eyelids, pale and dumb, shrinking from him almost as she had shrunk from him seven years ago by the old sundial in the moonlit garden, when it was a sin to listen to his ardent avowal.

'Ida, why are you silent? Why will you not speak of the past?'

'The past is past!' she said, falteringly. 'It was full of grief and shame for me. I want to forget it if I can.'

'Forget all that is bitter, remember all that

is sweet!' he pleaded, drawing nearer to her. 'There is much of that old time which is unspeakably dear to me—the happy time in which I first loved you, deeming you were free to be loved and won. You are free now, Ida, sole mistress of your fate and mine; and I love you as dearly now as I loved you seven years ago. More I could not love you, for I loved you then with all my heart and mind. Ida, you once talked of being mistress of Wendover Abbey. Its master is at your feet, your faithful slave to the end of his life. Will you have this old house for your own, Ida, and thus, and thus only, make it home for me?'

His arm was round her, gently, experimentally, the answer not being quite certain, even yet.

She slowly lifted the dark-fringed lids, looked at him with adoring eyes—eyes which never before had looked thus upon the face of man.

'Can you be in earnest?' she asked, in a low sweet voice. 'Can you lift me so high—I, that had fallen so low?'

He clasped her to his heart, and sealed the

promise of their unclouded future with a passionate kiss.

'At last, at last, I hold you in my arms!' he said fondly; 'but not for the first time, my angel!'

'What do you mean?'

'Who was it carried you out of the burning house last year?' he asked, smiling at her.

'Cheap Jack.'

'I was Cheap Jack.'

'You!'

'Yes. I lived far from the sight of this dear face, as long as I could bear my life, and then after five years of exile in far lands, where my soul sickened for the sight of you, I came back to England, heard in London that your husband was an idler and a drunkard, and foresaw evil days for my darling. I could be nothing to her; but at least I could watch over her, near at hand, yet unknown. So I took up my abode on the Hanger within a mile or so of her dwelling. Don't pity me, dearest. It was not a hard life after all. I had my books and Nature for my companions, all the joy I could have, not having you.'

'However shall I repay you?'

'Only look up to me as you looked just now, and let me feel you are my own for ever.'

THE END.

WILLIAM RIDER AND SON, PRINTERS, LONDON.